Transactions of the British Society for the History of Pharmacy

William H. Helfand

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A study of the nineteenth century pharmaceutical market

J. K. Crellin

A Note on Dr James's Fever Powder

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JAMES MORISON AND HIS PILLS

A study of the nineteenth century pharmaceutical market

*by William H. Helfand**

Morison's Pills were one of a broad group of widely advertised drug products offered for the alleviation and cure of different human ailments during the nineteenth century. Their developer, formulator and merchandiser, James Morison, was responsible for their success, for his flamboyant business methods had sufficient novelty and daring to outdistance most competition. An all embracing theory of health and disease helped too. Not surprisingly, Morison provoked an active and voluble response from critics both within and without the medical profession. In this, he ranks with other nineteenth century nostrum vendors—Samuel Solomon (1780—1819), Thomas Beecham (1820—1907), and Thomas Holloway (1800—1883), whose names and whose products became part of the general vocabulary. In tracing Morison's career and business and advertising methods we can better understand the marketplace in which his pills competed, and the purpose of this study is to do this by reviewing the product he sold, his career, his marketing methods, the business he developed, and the reaction of critics to his efforts.

1. *The Pills*

Active commercialization of Morison's Pills began in 1825, but development activity on their formulation was started several years earlier. Morison's official party line traces the origin back to 1822 when six different strengths were proposed.[1] However, there is evidence that his earliest attempts at formulation took place even before this, even as early as 1816, during a period of his life when Morison lived above the premises

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occupied by a firm of druggists in Aberdeen. His first product contained only two ingredients, aloes and oatmeal, but he worked to improve on this basic concept until he had expanded the line by combining the basic formula with a series of other ingredients, most of them in the laxative or cathartic class. Later the original six products were felt to be too unwieldy a number for the kind of exploitation Morison had in mind—he was always a man oriented to simple explanations where health and disease were concerned—and the number of different pill formulations was consequently narrowed to only two strengths when his full scale campaign began. The two pill formulations that survived the line reduction were aptly termed No. 1 and No. 2 and, as such, in the years that followed, were extensively promoted and made available in all parts of Great Britain and, subsequently, in many other countries of the world too. Their life span covered more than a century before they were finally discontinued. Although Morison clouded the issue and, as we shall see, often recommended that the two strengths be used interchangeably, at a later date the pills were more clearly defined as being a mild aperient (No. 1) and a purgative (No. 2).[2] Their compositions were, not surprisingly, secret, and Morison, of course, never divulged the exact formula of his pills. He did, at times, indicate the names of some of the ingredients present—for example, senna and jalap.[3] Secrecy—"beware of imitators" —was very important to him, and he guarded his valued manufacturing recipe well. In 1832 he published a letter warning against some imitation pills then on the market in the U.S.A., already a sector of growing interest to his expanding business, pointing out that only he and his partner,

> are privy to the knowledge of the true composition of these medicines ;—that one million of dollars would not purchase a copy of its recipe ;—and that, consequently, any spurious attempt at imitation, from the pretended possession of such a copy, is, and must be, founded on a barefaced falsehood.[4]

In his concern for secrecy, Morison was but one of a long line of nostrum vendors, dating back several centuries and including the well known Joshua Ward (1685—1761), James Graham (1745—1794), Richard Rock (fl, 1750), John Taylor (1708—1772), and many others who insisted on keeping their grand contributions to the health of humanity carefully unto themselves. Here, for example, is what Samuel Solomon, proprietor of the famous *Balm of Gilead*, had to say on the subject :

> Others have made a more direct attack upon my preparations, by pretending to have discovered their component parts—they have failed most egregriously—it is a secret which they have not the skill to discover, though envy would fain arrive at this desirable object. Like the critics, they overlook the beauties, in their eager search for something whereon to exercise their malignity—but I affirm my medicines are as far beyond the powers of research, as my fame is above the reach of malice.[5]

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Different investigators have presented different formulas for the pills whose content may, of course, have varied over time, and thus we do not have a definitive idea of exactly what was in each of them. MacEwan gives a representative recipe for the purgative, with the milder pill containing cream of tartar instead of gamboge :

Aloes		gr 30
Jalap Resin		
Ext. Colocynth		
Gamboge	aa	gr 15
Rhubarb		gr 45
Myrrh.....		gr 30

Mix and divide into 50 pills.[6]

Martindale states that the No. 1 pills do not contain gamboge, rhubarb or myrrh and that No. 2 differs from No. 1 only in that gamboge is present.[7] Another formula gives only aloes, tartaric acid and senna as being in the No. 1 pills and gives a formula rather close to that cited by MacEwan as defining the No. 2 pills.[8] Potter, an American author, adds cream of tartar to the list of ingredients, and this is confirmed by several other investigators.[9], [10] One chemist even noted the presence of asafoetida. With this confusion several aspects remain clear, however, for all the active ingredients noted are of vegetable origin and all are known to have some quality to act as cathartic agents, either mildly or drastically, depending on the dose employed.

Not surprisingly, there can be little novelty claimed for Morison's pills, for many of the same ingredients can be found in other patent medicines that preceeded his on the market. Anderson's Scots Pills, to choose but one of many examples, was first described in 1635, and remained on the British market for more than 300 years ; it contained aloes, anise, jalap, myrrh and possibly gamboge as well.[11]

Where the same ingredient was present in both the No. 1 and the No. 2 pills, it was, as expected, stronger in the No. 2, but this was not so in any particularly logical way. One analyst claimed that there were 3 gr of aloes in the No. 2 pill compared to $\frac{3}{4}$ gr in the No. 1—i.e., a ratio of four to one. However, at the same time, he noted that there were $1\frac{1}{2}$ gr of gamboge in the No. 2 pill compared to only $\frac{1}{2}$ gr. in the No. 1—i.e., three times as much.[12] But even this formula cannot be accepted with certainty, for another analysis in 1836 noted that there was twice as much weight of aloes in the No. 1 pill as in the No. 2, exactly the reverse of what one might normally expect.[13] Today, our understanding of how such disparate results could possibly exist is perhaps explained by the lack of good manufacturing practices on the part of the manufacturing staff at the British College of Health. The pills were very uneven, either as a result of poor mixing or poor pill rolling. In any event, we do have some evidence

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that quality control was practically non-existent. Testifying at a trial where Morison's Pills were accused of being the cause of death, a chemist of Long Acre, Mr. Hume, noted that ten of the larger pills in a box of the No. 1 strength weighed 27 gr., but that ten of the smaller pills from the same box weighed only 20 gr. And according to the witness, the same sort of imbalance was found in the No. 2 box. In another report given at a trial after the death of a 20-year-old youth from Morison's Pills, a witness reported on cases in which 6 pills produced to effect at all, and yet the addition of only one or two additional pills was capable of producing violent and uncontrollable purging. The witness, a chemist who had been asked to analyse the pills, added :

> . . . the components are occasionally very imperfectly mixed—probably from large quantities being prepared at a time, and the mass not triturated with sufficient care.[14]

Normally, with pharmaceutical products, in cases where there are two strengths, the custom is to term one of them ' forte ', ' plus ', or even No. 2 as Morison did, and to recommend the larger of the two for more serious cases, older patients, or perhaps to be taken with lesser frequency. Not so Morison. For him, the rule was for each pill to be taken alternately. For example, a brochure giving directions for the use of the Pills in the 1830's recommends :

> Nos. 1 and 2 are both aperient and purgative, and may be used indiscriminately but experience has proved that No. 2 is the most efficacious in subduing many diseases, in fevers of all kinds, inflammations, asthma, small-pox, measles, gout, colics, cancer, and in all violent diseases or pain, it is necessary to take one dose of No. 1 to-day, the same of No. 2 tomorrow, and repeat the No. 2 the next day, increasing the dose by one pill every third day.
> In consumptions and nervous affections, it is desirable to take alternate doses of No. 1 and 2.[15]

For most conditions, this type of alternate dosing was recommended. For example, the treatment regimen indicated for extreme debility, weakness, wastings, declines or consumptions was :

> To proceed slowly and cautiously, with two pills of No. 1 and 2 alternately for 3 or 4 days, and advance a pill a day unto 5, and to stop at the number 1 and 2 alternately day after day . . .[16]

For gout and related disorders, including tic douloureux, jaundice, liver complaints or asthma :

> commence with five pills No. 1, and next day, at the same hour, 5 of No. 2 ; then increase one pill a day up to 8, and continue daily with that number, 1 and 2 alternately.[17]

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For urinary obstructions or rupture, the posology was more interesting in a mathematical sense,

> . . . commence with 5 No. 1, next day 6 No. 2, third day 7 No. 1, fourth day 8 No. 2, and continue 8 No. 1 and 2 alternately.[18]

And many other variations could be cited. For syphilis and other venereal disease problems, only the No. 2 pills were called for in the active stages of the disease, and there are a few other exceptions to the cardinal rule of alternating the two doses.

As to the quantity of pills to take per dose or per day there was also wide variation, but the general recommendation was the more the better. Normally one would expect the dosage to depend on the condition treated, its severity and the age of the patient, but such considerations did not play an active part in the recommendation of how many pills to take. Sometimes the dosage to start called for one or two pills, but at other times, as in asthma, the patient was directed to commence with five pills on the first day. Often the dosage recommended was high, the general average being 15 to 20 pills per day, but at times the dose even exceeded this. According to Morison, there was nothing to be concerned about at this level, for :

> . . . patients have taken 30, 40 and 50 pills at a time in severe and urgent cases ; and what was the consequence ? Nothing but that they were the sooner well.[19]

The idea of such huge doses was a novelty at the time and was a major part of Morison's marketing strategy. But there were precedents for such quantities. Before Morison arrived on the scene the case of an Englishman who took over 225,000 pills during the 22 years between 1794 and 1816 was recorded ; during the peak year of this extended binge, in 1814, the total ingested was 51,590.[20] Morison himself notes instances where patients had consumed rather large quantities, such as a London grocer who reported taking 18,000 pills. In an unfortunate experience in 1836, one of his agents was fined rather severely for administering 1000 pills over a 20 day period to one John MacKenzie who died, as a result of this largesse, in his 32nd year.[21] The agent, it was duly reported, paid the fine on the spot. In treating Mackenzie, he had prescribed a regimen of 20 No. 1 pills at night and then 20 No. 2 pills the following morning in order to, as he noted at his trial, "drive off the No. 1's". Later, the dosage was to increase by 5 pills each dose, both night and morning.[10] At such levels it is hardly surprising that the patient succumbed. In another trial that took place in 1834, one witness admitted to taking 35 pills a day, and Morison's son, John, claimed to have taken 30 per day for three months in a row.[12] A witness at the Mackenzie trial testified to taking 20,000 pills over a 2 year period.[22] At such levels, the comment of one critic, that "the

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virtues of this quack medicine are said to reside in large doses", is understandable.[23]

Obviously, a recommendation for such a volume of pills implied safety ; this undoubtedly played a part in convincing the public to try the pills. Morison did take into account possible reticence on the part of some patients :

> Have no dread of overdoses ; but to ease your apprehensions, if you have any, begin with a moderate dose, and increase a pill or two at a time . . .[24]

There was a logical reason, according to its inventor, for taking Morison's Pills in large doses :

> . . . the larger the dose . . . the easier they act and do more good. This is very easily explained and made comprehensible to every body. When they are taken into the stomach, they become digested and enter the circulation. It is their quality and virtue to give that impulse to the blood, so as to make it bring all its impurities to the bowels to be purged off ; they collect them there from all the organs and parts of the body. If you do not take a dose sufficiently strong to carry them out of the body, you leave them there collected, and they cause you uneasiness, which you would not have felt if the dose had been larger. The only remedy then, is to take a larger dose next night.[25]

In other words, if two won't work, why not take four ? Finally, as to length of therapy, Morison did give good advice by suggesting that the pills be taken until the patient would feel quite well, and then even some days longer. Again, his reasoning was identical to that explaining the purpose of a high dose—to be sure that all the corrupt humours in the body were properly expelled.

Although the product achieved world renown under the name of Morison's Pills, its inventor, of course, did not refer to his discovery in this way. To him they were the vegetable universal medicine, the Hygeian Vegetable Universal Medicine, or often just the universal medicine, and he continuously referred to these titles throughout his extensive advertising and in all his published works. The vegetable in the title distinguished the pills from calomel primarily, but also from other like products of chemical and therefore of non-natural, or as Morison preferred, organic, origin, and the adjective "universal" indicated to all that there was absolutely no medical problem, chronic or acute, the pills could not handle. As Morison noted :

> . . . the numerous cures they have effected in all kinds of diseases, surgical cases, and mental derangements, have gained them the name of Universal Medicine . . .[26]

and the title itself was offered as proof of the correctness of the theory which lay behind it.

Under a series of owners, all part of the Morison family, the pills

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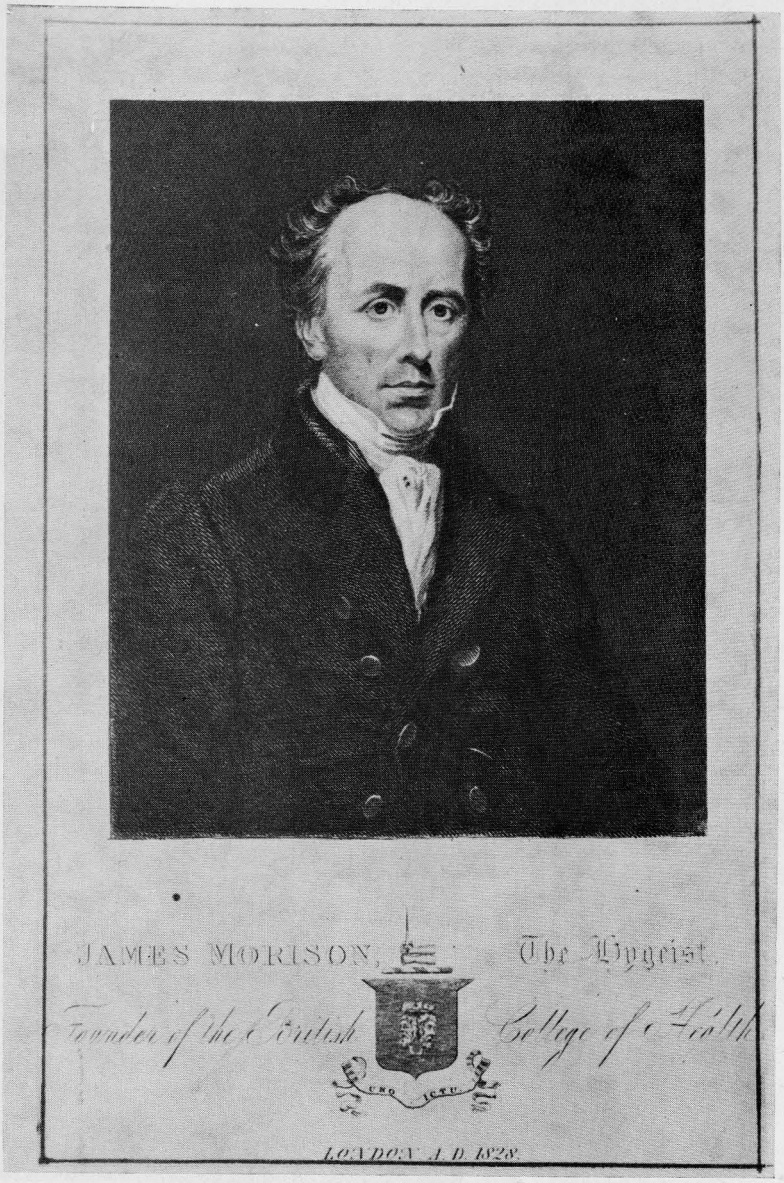

I. JAMES MORISON, 1770—1840

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MORISONIANA;

OR,

FAMILY ADVISER

OF THE

BRITISH COLLEGE OF HEALTH.

BEING A COLLECTION OF THE

WORKS OF MR. MORISON, THE HYGEIST;

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1831.

II. TITLE PAGE OF *MORISONIANA*

III. THE BRITISH COLLEGE OF HEALTH, EUSTON ROAD, LONDON.

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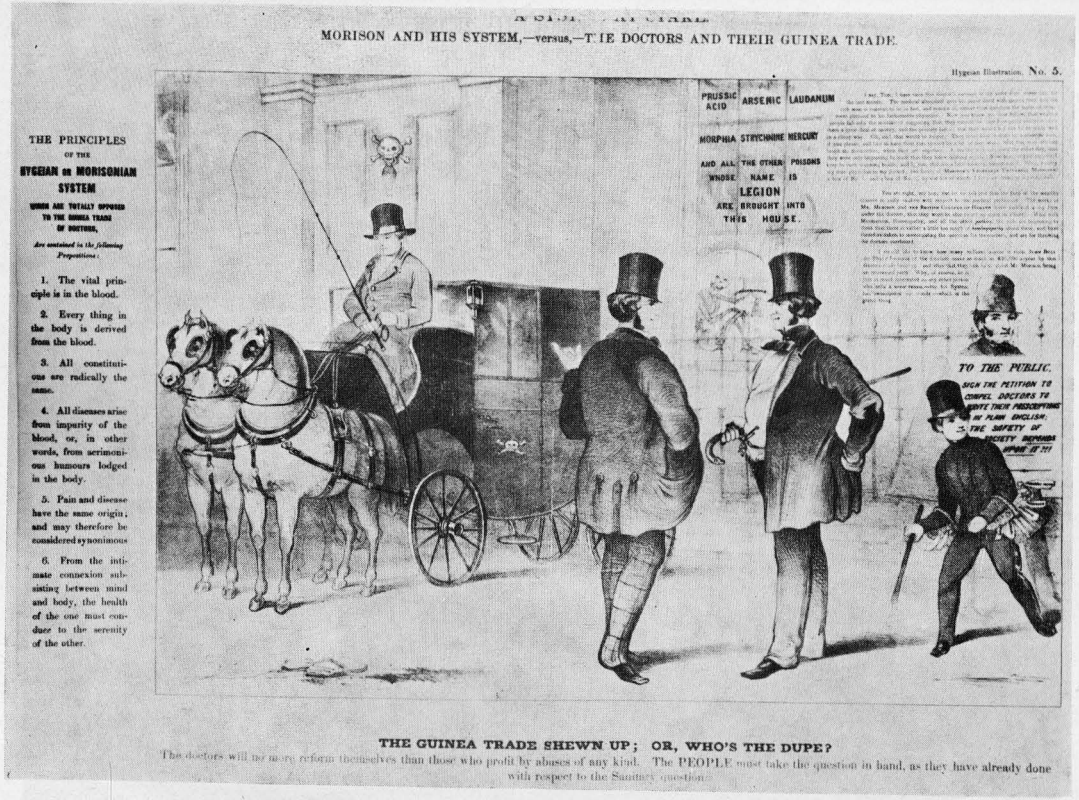

IV. One of the Hygeian Illustrations (3d plain 6d coloured) issued by Morison to publicize his pills and criticize the medical profession. The two gentlemen observing the physician's carriage comment on the poor treatment given and the high fees charged. Their own stalwart health is attributed to Morison's pills.

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remained on the market in England until about 1929 and were still being sold in other countries for several years after 1930. Happily for the health of the general public, their flamboyant promotion continued only until the 1860's, after which Morison's Pills became lost in the large number of similarly formulated specialities which flooded the Victorian pharmaceutical market.

2. *The Hygeist*

The man who developed the formula and successfully marketed the vegetable universal medicine was fortunate to have been at the right place at the right time. The 1820's in England were years of steady economic growth in an atmosphere of relative calm after the more than 20 years of war with France that had ended with Waterloo in 1815. It was a transitional period during which England moved away from the agricultural economy of most of the eighteenth century to the industrial economy of most of the nineteenth. Partly as a result of this, there was a doubling of the population in England during Morison's life, from 1780 to 1840—before 1780 it had taken several centuries to double. And it was also a period in which the values we normally associate with Victorianism—respectability, drive for success, optimism, social conscience, and a high level of personal and social morality—began to be operative. New methods of communications, marketing, advertising and transportation, products of the continuing industrial revolution, were altering the social life of the people and were helping to create new business situations for those with an adventurous spirit and an entrepreneurial approach to opportunity.

James Morison was one of these opportunists. He was born at Bognie, near Aberdeen, on March 3, 1770. His family was both respectable and affluent, a grandfather having been the Laird of Bognie and Frendraught. His youth was spent in the vicinity of Aberdeen and he obtained some education at Marischal College of the University of Aberdeen, where he spent but one year between the ages of 13 and 14, and at Hanau, in Germany. His intent may have been to become a physician.[27] He then became a merchant, and over the next 30 years travelled widely throughout Europe and across the Atlantic. He spent some time in Riga, where and older brother, John, had preceeded him, and in the West Indies where another brother, George, had ventured earlier. In the Caribbean, Morison entered the wine and spirit trade and, before he left to return to Europe in 1814, was able to put together some wealth and property. But his brother George died that year and Morison gave up his life in the West Indies and returned to Bordeaux, where he lived, according to the writer of his obituary, in great respectability.[28] From here he returned to Aberdeen where, while living in a house belonging to George Reid, a partner with one David Souter in a firm of druggists, his interest in the pill

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business actively began. There is some suggestion that Morison commenced his pharmaceutical career as an itinerant quack, hawking his wares from a stall or from the street as had so many other nostrum vendors before him, but the evidence for this is doubtful.[29] We do not know exactly what propelled him into this new activity, for nothing in his previous life appears to have prepared him for it ; it might have been the fact that one of his older brothers, Alexander, was a physician, but it may also have been little more than the availability of the pill machine in the druggist's shop.

Morison, to be sure, had his own version of the discovery and the telling and re-telling of it played a major role in his overall marketing strategy for the pills. To him, their development was an absolute necessity, for without their health-giving properties he would have been prematurely dead. In the gospel according to Morison, he was in ill-health for most of his life, at least for the 35 year period between the ages of 16 and 50. During this time, suffering and disease were constantly with him, and serve partly to explain his peripatetic nature. In his own words,

> . . . from my 16th year, I had passed a life of disease, physical misery, and woe. During that long period, I thought, believed, and acted as others do who are in search of health :—boarding schools, confinement, and costiveness, were the parents that gave birth to my disease.[30]

Throughout this long period he consulted with at least 50 physicians, including the influential John Hunter whom he saw in 1802, and also sought the advice of others who could have been expected to help him, trying a broad variety of possible remedies to alleviate his not too clearly defined but still most serious problem. Among his symptoms were :

> Total want of sleep, constant beating and uneasiness about the heart, dejection, the feeling of something like a bar across the lower part of my breast, no relish for amusement nor anything else, costiveness . . .[31]

Just a partial list of all that Morison tried during his period of suffering is impressive—change of air, exercise, anthelmintics, vermifuges, cold baths, mineral waters, stomachics, bitters, valerian, ether, quinine, asaphoetida, calomel and other mercurials, mineral purges and laxative pills were all on the list. Everything, according to the patient, except laudanum and bleeding. He wore steel trusses and even surgery was attempted.

> Thus I continued, year after year, struggling with disease—my speedy dissolution was often looked for—my meridian of life passed—the powers and energy of life fast subsiding—my faculties impairing, and sight becoming dim. I was fast descending into the grave—the lightest meal gave me all the horrors of indigestion—that low languid state of it in which the sufferer finds no ease or rest any way—my glands in the neck and groin obstructed—irritable, peevish, sleepless—my joints stiff, and my feet filled with excruciating pains, so that I could scarcely walk—on my elbows and

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> shoulders the flesh appearing raw, the skin being eat away by the acrimony of the humours. Such was I in my 51st year ; and my original complaint, the cause and source of all these evils, remaining the same.[32]

It was at this moment of desperation that Morison began to take things into his own hands, according to his detailed account of the events leading up to discovery of the Pills. He notes that by 1820, he began to ' acquire new ideas ' and

> I began to reason with myself on all that had passed, and had been done. I soon saw the futility of the whole . . . I said to myself, what can it be that makes me so ill, so miserable ?[32]

Of course, one may well ask whether or not this was the first time such musings had taken place for a man so desperately ill, but if not, at least the question had never before received a satisfactory answer. In this case, however, it did :

> It can then be nothing else but my bad humours, which, from my stomach and bowels, are diffused all over my body. I then rested settled as to that point, resolved to place my confidence in the vegetable universal medicine as the only rational purifiers of the blood and system . . .[33]

He concludes this personal history by noting in 1825 that :

> My most sanguine expectations, three years ago, could not have anticipated such a result. I was dying, and 10 times worse than any of you, and, as you see the disease was old.[34]

This tale, with some creative variations, resembles the histories put forth by salesmen of other nostrums who both preceeded and came after Morison. Here, for example, are the words of John Walker, the proprietor of the California Vinegar Bitters,

> I was left broken down in body and pocket. I had Consumption, Bronchitis, Palpitation of the Heart, Piles and Rheumatism in my hip. My leg became paralyzed and my body partially so. Physicians prescribed for me . . . At last they pronounced me incurable, and die I thought I must.[35]

Walker continues in this vein and reviews the events leading up to his great discovery. He then concludes,

> After laborious experiments I perfected my compound and commenced taking, and to my utter surprise in three weeks was able to attend to business, and after using eight months I felt better than ever before in my life, and considered myself well.

In Morison's personal case there was, he duly noted, a physical event that bore witness to his cure, and he used it often in proclaiming the marvels of his product. Some 2½ years after he started taking the pills for his own

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problems he passed, from the mouth of his stomach, a ' substance of a skinny, glutinous nature, four or five inches long, molded like a gut.' Its passing, he felt, was solely due to the pills, and the ' substance ' was felt to be the cause of all his ill health of such long duration. Unfortunately, neither medical nor surgical science is able to explain this singular phenomenon. Nor is it possible to state categorically the impetus in his life that led Morison to pursue his chosen career. There are several hypotheses--the fact that an older brother, Alexander, became a successful practicing physician in Scotland, the fact that two of his daughters died at almost the same time in 1823, two years before he first marketed the pills commercially, the probability that he had masochistic tendencies (the only other therapy he ever supported was a system of beating and rubbing of the skin with sharp and hard instruments), or the fact that he was, as one physician recently noted, a chronic hysteric[36]—but none can be held with certainty.

The years between 1816 and 1825, when Morison began to actively publicize his pills, were spent in perfecting the formula and in considering how best to merchandise it. The formula for the latter was even more important than the formula for the ingredients in the pills themselves. Once launched, the pills became a substantial success and Morison became a rich man. He appropriated a name, ' The Hygeist ' to distinguish himself from the members of the medical profession, and adopted a motto, ' Uno ictu ' (at one blow) which perfectly sums up his philosophy. From his portraits he also appears to have enjoyed good health during this final period of his life. He was 55 years old when commercial success finally came to him, and he was able to enjoy 15 years of it, dividing his time between England and France, before dying in a house at No. 2 rue des Pyramides, in Paris on 3 May, 1840. He is buried in a family crypt at the cemetery in Kensal Green. His successors in the business were pleased to report that, at the moment of his death, he was reaching for a box of the vegetable pills. And the *Journal des Debats*, in reporting on his death, duly recorded that he was a ' celebrated English physician '.[37]

3. *The Hygeian system*

As we have seen, Morison used certain methods in the promotion of his pills that were common to other patent medicine merchants : an insistence on secrecy, an insistence on the need to apprehend and punish imitators and countefeiters, and the telling in morbid detail, of his personal medical history and the failure of orthodox medical practice to find a solution. Not surprisingly, there are other aspects of his approach that he shared with his colleagues. After all, the pharmaceutical industry, in all its sectors from the purely ethical manufactuter at one end of the spectrum to the outright charlatan at the other, is governed by the same economic laws of supply and demand as is all industry. By Morison's time the technological

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advances stimulated by continuing developments that took place during the yearly years of the industrial revolution had insured the availability of proper equipment for large scale manufacture of many essential items ; consequently, by the 1820's there were indeed machines capable of producing large quantities of needed products. The problem then became one of marketing rather than one of production. And, as always, the use of a proper psychology has been necessary to insure marketing success.

The successful nostrum proprietors have all been masters of the proper psychological appeal in the promotion of their products. To be sure, there have been certain standard approaches that have been used over and over again irrespective of the type of product being sold, its indications or claims, its country of sale or even of the era in which it appeared. As Garrison noted, "the folkways of medicine are inevitably the same and independent of time and place and circumstance".[38] Similar themes occur in the ' patter ' or ' spiel ' of the street quack or stage doctor and in the quasi-scientific pronouncements of the patent medicine merchants of the late nineteenth century. And, identical ideas can be found in the promotion of products on both sides of the Atlantic and, probably, in other parts of the world. To consider only the names of products as an example, common themes include the use of longevity (e.g., Turlington's Elixir of Life), credentials of the proprietor (e.g., Doctor Anderson's Pills), tie-ins with far away places (e.g., The Balm of Gilead), remote cultures (e.g., Roman Eye Balsam), religions (e.g., Quaker Bitters) or even magic (e.g., Hamlin's Wizard Oil). Promotional themes have a tendency to dwell on fear or even death. They show a great concern for developing an image of credibility, either by proclaiming the wisdom or medical background of their creator (often portrayed as a benefactor of humanity) or by using testimonials either from the famous, including statesmen, members of royalty, scientists, physicians, etc., or when these are not available, by offering quotes from quite ordinary citizens. Appeals are frequently made to faith or to patriotism. Often approaches are through theories, usually new, elaborate or radical which accompany the product and explain its activity. Invariably there are promotional approaches which include warnings against the evils of the medical profession and orthodoxy itself. And, above all, it is more the volume and the continuity of the promotion for the product that has been responsible for success than the chosen theme itself.

From this menu Morison chose primarily to dwell on three aspects—a single cause and a single cure for all diseases, the ignorance and evil of the members of the medical profession, and the widespread and continual publication of thousands and thousands of words to expound on the virtues of his pills. He based his strategy on his keen understanding of public attitudes towards health and disease, and capitalized on the

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lessons learned during his long business apprenticeship in several parts of the world. He was fortunate in his choice of England as a base of operations, for his many predecessors in the nostrum business had developed methods to tap the rich market for products promising health and longevity. Writing almost a century before Morison's pharmaceutical activities began, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu pointed out that ' The English are, more than any other nation, infatuated by the prospect of universal medicine '.[39] Even in his choice of a name for his product, the Vegetable Universal Medicine, Morison set out to meet the market needs. To show his desire to do nothing other than aid all mankind he duly recorded that his original intent was to give his panacea freely to all comers and, following this, he gave lectures and treated the sick without demanding pay. But soon, as had so many of his predecessors who offered similar products, he found that the ' thing given away free is not appreciated ' and so he decided to charge for it.

There are ten points to Morison's system :

1. The vital principle is contained in the blood.
2. Blood makes blood.
3. Everything in the body is derived from the blood.
4. All constitutions are radically the same.
5. All diseases arise from the impurity of the blood, or in other words, from acrimonious humours lodged in the body.
6. This humour which degenerates the blood has three sources, the maternine, the contagious and the personal.
7. Pain and disease have the same origin : and may therefore be considered synonymous terms.
8. Purgation by vegetables is the only effectual mode of eradicating disease.
9. The stomach and bowels cannot be purged too much.
10. From the intimate connection subsisting between the mind and the body, the health of the one must conduce to the serenity of the other.[40]

Simply stated, the Hygeian canon is that the blood controls everything and all disease comes from impurities in it ; these must be purged by vegetables and it is impossible to purge too much. It can be argued, of course, that there was little new in Morison's theory, for it mainly derived from the humoural view of health and disease as advocated by writers since Hippocrates and Galen, and by the herbalists, of which group Nicolas Culpepper is an important late example. Morison's contribution, if it can indeed be called that, was to single out blood as the prime mover of all things, and to largely forget about the phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. As to purging, it is somewhat difficult for us today to acknowledge that it was possible to write so much about a single normal life process. The Hygeian theory proposed that the proper circulation of the blood was essential for good health and it was therefore necessary to keep the blood properly moving ; this demanded continuous purgation. The

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Vegetable Universal Medicine cured all diseases because it was able to remove the bad humours—coming from all possible sources—and this could allow the free circulation of the blood. The Hygeists, all men who themselves claimed to have been cured of some serious problem by the pills, could become absolutely ecstatic at the thought of purging, and some of their more poetic pronouncements on the subject had an almost Molière like quality :

> —It is impossible there can be any real cure but by sound purging[41]
>
> —It may be said to be the only thing that cannot be overdone, and may be continued for any length of time[42]
>
> —Purging is to the human body . . . what the draining has been to the land[43]

and finally,

> —. . . you will now for the future know, that the foundation of good health, a sound mind, and all their attendants, for your children, depends on one single act—that of purging their stomach and bowels . . .[44]

Morison was no believer in a single remedy for a single condition, for his single cause theory was all embracing. One would normally expect the pills to be effective in those conditions where a strong laxative might be expected to do some good, and physicians today do agree that where properly indicated proper doses of the pills would be an effective laxative. But Morison's catalog of indications is infinitely broader than this, and the target diseases include many that one might not normally associate with a cathartic product. For example, one of the chief indications dwelt on at great length was cholera. Indeed, one of Morison's first pamphlets, '*A letter addressed to the honourable the court of directors of the United East India Company proposing an easy and safe remedy for the prevention and cure of the Cholera Morbus . . .*' was issued in 1825, and presented no doubt at all as to the efficacy of the pills in this hitherto improperly treated malady. During the serious cholera epidemic in England in 1832, the pills were widely trumpeted as cures for cholera. In York,

> Morison's pills were popular and there had been reference at a meeting of the Board to a mother who had given six of them to cure her child of a pain in the bowels. Later it was admitted to the cholera hospital where it died. Rumour had it, that it was the pills which had killed the child. ' A more unfounded report was never issued ' wrote Mr. J. Webb of the British College of Health. The pills were not only innocent but all powerful.
>
> . . . The vivid testimony of Mrs. Ann Swaine of Walmgate could not fail to impress readers with its powers : ' The violent pains in my side could not be cured by the York Dispensary or by any other medical man in this city, but fifteen Morison's Pills per night for three weeks caused me to quit such a quantity of bile and corruption from my stomach and bowels that I was a wonder to all who witnessed it.[45]

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But there were many other indications in addition to cholera, and these included apoplexy, bashfulness, cancer, deformities and dislocations, hemorrhoids, insanity, jaundice, ringworm, ruptures, smallpox and yellow fever. And this is only a partial list. The medicine was also of value as a prophylactic against syphilis and could also be recommended to treat an over-ruddy complexion. Not surprisingly, it could also be of value in conditions Morison termed ' opposite diseases' such as diarrhoea and costiveness. The all embracing theory could explain it all. What cannot be satisfactorily explained, however, is the inductive leap made by Morison from his personal cure by the pills for his specific ailment to the potential for cure in all cases. For this the Hygeian theory had to be invented.

The theory postulated a single cause and a single cure for all disease, and in propounding it, Morison was following earlier theorists who had, in varied ways, advocated simplistic solutions for complex matters. Perhaps the best known of this group is John Brown (1735—1788), whose system was based on the ' excitability ' of living tissue, and the response of various parts of the body to such stimulation. According to Brown, there was only one pathological state, an imbalance between the agents influencing the body and its excitability, with one or the other being predominant.[46] Treatment of various diseases then consisted of either stimulation or depression of the diseased state, usually with alcohol or opium. William Cullen, Brown's teacher, Thomas Beddoes and Benjamin Rush were other systematists who, in different ways, also put forth ideas which advocated single causes for most human ills. To Cullen, it was a nervous principle which was the controlling influence on all bodily processes, and treatment was therefore to be based on either irritation or relaxation of the part of the body affected. But of all the members of this group it is perhaps a little known German physician, Johann Kâmpf, whose thinking Morison most closely approaches. Kâmpf originated the ' doctrine of the infarctus ' in which the cause of most diseases was claimed to be fecal impaction.[47]

4. *The Doctors*

Morison launched his pills on the market in England in 1825 with the publication of seven pamphlets proclaiming his new theory, the virtues of his Vegetable Universal Medicine, and the evils of the orthodox system of medical practice then in vogue. He was careful to proclaim himself ' not a doctor ' but in order to improve his credentials he moved from an address on Frith St., Soho, to, what was then, a better area, and established his business on Claremont Place, Judd Street, which connected with Euston Road. Three years later, in 1828, after achieving some early success with the pills, he moved nearby, to Hamilton Place, New Road, across from the present site of the St. Pancras Station, where he built an

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imposing building to which he gave the name ' The British College of Health '. One writer recently noted that he was moved to do this ' as a man well aware of the British reverence for learned societies '.[48] The College remained on this site (No. 33 Euston Rd.) for almost 100 years, in its latter period (1916—1928), becoming a Salvation Army Shelter.

> This was one of the cleverest things he ever did, for by taking on a sort of corporate philanthropic existence he removed himself from the category of a mere commercial exploiter of a proprietary medicine, surrounding himself with devotees who had an ardent belief in his personal power and the virtue of his phylactery.[49]

according to one author, but there were other points of view on the question. The American critic, Oliver Wendell Holmes, writing in the 1840's, felt that

> The common method of supporting barefaced imposture at the present day . . . consists in trumping up ' Dispensaries,' ' Colleges of Health ' and other advertising charitable clap-traps, which use the poor as decoy-ducks for the rich.'[50]

But, of course, this ' front ' was as necessary to him as it has always been to the nostrum manufacturer. From this stronghold, pictured in some of the caricatures later published as part of the public reaction to his blatant advertising, Morison actively carried out his campaign against the doctors. ' The old Medical science is completely wrong ' proclaims the title page of *Morisoniana*, the 600 plus page volume containing many of his writings. It was wrong because of several reasons. It failed to appreciate the positive contribution to human health made by the Hygeian theory, it was too tied to the mumbo-jumbo of religion, it relied too much on minerals and chemicals in its therapeutics (including that absolute horror—mercury), it used a mysterious language that only the initated could understand, it bilked the public by charging heavily and unfairly for its questionable services and, of course, it did not make any use at all of the Vegetable Universal Medicine in treating patients. Medicine was also berated because it had no system, and, to Morison, a science without principles is no science at all. The contrast with the new system was considerable.

> Medical men have been labouring and studying since Hippocrates (more than 2,000 years) without ever establishing any fixed principles as to their science. All has been random and conjecture with them ! Not so with the Hygeian System ! Its principles are as fixed and invariable as those of other sciences, such as astronomy, navigation, or music, which are now brought to great perfection and can be depended on.[51]

That physicians even carried out research to learn more about the problems they were treating was considered merely a waste of time, and

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that they admitted the possibility that there might be cases where they did not know all the answers was a subject for derision.

> The three words ' one may try ' should not be more ridiculous and hazarded, coming from me, than from the mouth of many a learned doctor. I have often experienced from them no sounder argument for their prescriptions. Indeed, they were all random trials, without any design or principle in them . . . The trial has now been made, and with success.[52]

At times Morison got carried away

> Don't hearken to any medical adviser ; they are all prejudiced and warped up in the false doctrines of their medical schools, which doctrines are founded on error, and that they will hearken to nothing reasonable that can be said.[53]

Morison's battle with the medical establishment was visually continued with a series of ' *Hygeian Illustrations* ' which first appeared towards the end of his life and which were continued by his sons who succeeded him in running the business. Their titles—' *Downfall of the Doctors,* '' *The way in which the doctors by the help of poisons get the guineas out of the pockets of John Bull,*' *The guinea trade shewn up,*' ' *Morality of modern medicine mongers,*' etc. give some idea of their subtlety. Although they were issued with the words ' Price 3d plain and 6d coloured,' it is probable that they were handed out generously as publicity pieces. The pages of the house organ of the British College of Health, *The Hygeist,* were also used to print other illustrations of the same type. Still another technique of the British College of Health was to make use of critical statements by physicians against their colleagues. Medicine, as well as other professions, has always been self critical, but critical statements taken out of context could be expected to be somewhat damaging. The publicity department of the manufacturers of Morison's Pills had a collection of such critical statements and used them frequently. Thus, an advertising card issued in 1851 began ' The members of the British College of Health deem it their duty to give as much publicity as possible to the following admissions of doctors as regards their own craft . . .'[54], and then listed a series of quotations from recognized members of the current medical establishment. One would not normally expect any group to take this abuse without lashing back, and, of course, physicians did not. Thomas Wakely, who had founded the *Lancet* in 1823, was a leader in the fight, but other individuals and other journals helped too. Physicians were aroused not so much by Morison's rhetoric, but by the results some of them saw in patients who had succumbed to his publicity. There were several court cases recorded before 1835, and many of them in 1835 and 1836, in which overdoses of the pills could be directly attributed to the cause of death. These cases were eagerly pounced upon by a medical press anxious to have good reason to respond to Morison's provocation. Similar cases

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were reported over the next few years, and in 1837, for example, there were 12 deaths in York alone that could be attributed to the pills.[55] At one point Wakely felt the government should do something about it :

> . . . Morison . . . pays upwards of £7000 a year to the Government for the three-halfpenny stamps* with which his boxes of trash are plastered ! What must be the character of that Legislature which thus submits to be bribed into a toleration of a system so disasterous to the public health, and which, if it were a little more widely extended, would complete the ruin of the medical profession, as it has already proved the disgrace—of medical science in this country.[56]

In his underlying concern for medical reform, Wakeley consistently used Morison as a springboard to launch his attacks against secret medicines, the failure of the Society of Apothecaries to take appropriate measures to curtail their excesses, the loopholes in the Apothecaries Act of 1815 which permitted such excesses in the first place, against the concept of medical liberty of the subject, and against all quackery in general. His attack on the Apothecaries' Company was particularly vehement :

> What a spectacle has this trial exhibited in a civilized country ! What a reflection is it upon the discernment of the public ! What a stigma on the state of medical laws ! What a disgrace does it reflect upon the government ! Above all, however, what is to be said of the conduct of the Apothecaries' Company who have, so far as we can learn, never taken a single step to punish Morison . . .[13]

Wakely was convinced that Morison, although not licenced to do so, was acting as an apothecary because he was a prescriber, compounder and seller of a medicine useful for all types of disease. Furthermore, he even employed agents and assistants to administer and prescribe his medicines. All of this certainly could lead the general public to consider him as an apothecary, yet the group that was empowered to control the activities of men such as he, did nothing to regulate his behaviour. Either the fault was thus with the members of the Society of Apothecaries themselves or it was with the provisions of the Apothecaries Act of 1815. In any event, Morison's activities were not being controlled by anyone.

Wakely was consistently bold in his attacks on Morison and had no tendency to mince any words in voicing his personal feelings. He openly referred to ' Messrs. Morison & Moat, quack medicine vendors '[57] and the index to Volume 4 of *Lancet* has a listing for ' Morison—pill quackery.' He went even further than this :

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*From 1783 to 1941 a medicine stamp tax was in effect in Great Britain, requiring a stamp to be affixed to every box, packet, bottle, phial or other container in whicha packaged medicine was sold. The tax rate varied over the years, but throughout most of the nineteenth century a tax of 1½d was applied to any package selling for one shilling or less.

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> Why, is it not notoriously true, that the veriest blockheads who ever breathed, are prescribing and administering ' universal pills ' from one end of the kingdom to another ?[58]

In suggesting that the golden rule (to do unto himself as he had done unto others) be applied to Morison, ' the Hygeist would have been forced to swallow a peck of his own pills and thus relieve society of his presence '.[59] Later, as his campaign against Morison intensified, Wakeley referred to him as a monster, unprincipled, mercenary, and in a memorable outburst, as ' the man-slaughterer '.

The libel case that brought forth Wakeley's ire and caused him to openly use such strong language is useful in revealing something of the promotional methods used by the British College of Health in 1834. A suit had been brought against Morison by one Dr. Purcell, a surgeon and apothecary who practiced at Stockbridge. The doctor had attended and aided a boy who had become ill following a childish prank. He claimed to have cured the boy of his illness, but during treatment the boy had also been visited by one of Morison's agents who, it appears, denounced Purcell's procedures, and administered some of Morison's Pills. Later, when the boy had completely recovered, Morison had the case written up in elaborate detail, showing the doctor to be a fraud and the pills the true saviour of human life. The article was published as the last of the 85*th series of cases of cure by Morison's Pills*, a pamphlet which was given, as a rule, to purchasers of boxes of the pills by Morison's agents.[60] The write-up of the case also appeared in several issues of the *Christian Advocate*, a weekly newspaper half owned by Morison's partner, Moat, under the provocative title ' A dreadful instance of cruelty and maltreatment practiced on a poor child by one of the faculty,' under the anonymous authorship of ' a correspondent in Hampshire '. The *Lancet*, not surprisingly, called attention to Moat's business relationship with Morison, to whom it wryly referred as a man "who had been much before the public lately, administering a quack medicine called ' universal medicine ',"[61] and, in summing up, applauded the verdict which awarded £500 to the plaintiff, Purcell. It warned too that :

> If such libels on the talents and humanity of private practitioners could be published with impunity by unprincipled quacks, within a very few years the members of the medical profession would be reduced to the lowest possible state of public degredation.[58]

Publicity on those cases which came to court was fanned by a barrage of articles in the medical and lay press, the excitement reaching a peak between 1834 and 1836, and continuing even up until 1839. Since this was the time when Morison began to spend more time in Paris, one may properly feel there to be a connection between these sets of events. The

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trials covered, among others, deaths of a young man who had been treated for smallpox, a 17-month-old girl, a woman who had been known to take 14 to 16 pills at a time,[62] an epileptic patient who took 20 pills 2 days in a row[63] and an innkeeper who took the pills in secret while, at the same time, visiting a physician to be cured of the side effects they caused.[64] And it was not only *Lancet* who publicized these unhappy events, for there were articles in the *London Medical Gazette* and other medical journals as well, and in lay publications such as the *Weekly Dispatch*. In 1837 the campaign of this lay journal was lauded at a testimonial dinner ' for the determined manner in which they had, almost single handed, exposed to the all-too-readily deluded community the pill villainies of Morison . . .'[55]

The small pox death affected one Richard Robinson, 20 years of age, who appears to have taken an average of 15 pills per day during the course of his illness. On at least one day, his level of ingestion reached 50 pills.[65] His physician may have understated the case by noting that :

> he died of smallpox, very properly aggravated by drastic purgatives. Morison's Pills would, in my opinion, tend to accelerate death.'[12]

The death of the baby girl, whose mother had been advised by Morison's representative to increase her dose to 22 pills in 24 hours, prompted an irate letter writer to denounce ' another instance of the destruction of a victim to the insatiable avarice of the health destroying quack Morison.'[66] One inspiring aspect of one of these cases was the testimony given in defence of the pills by John Morison, one of the two sons who were to continue the business after the death of the founder ;

> I know nothing of the manufactory ; my father only sells two sorts, Nos. 1 and 2. I am an attorney at Gray's Inn. I have taken these pills by hundreds, 30 per day for three months successively.'[12]

From this it is hard to tell if his son's testimony helped or harmed Morison. In this case, as in almost all of the trials concerning death from the pills, the verdict was invariably guilty—but it was always the agent who was affected, never Morison himself. And this evasivness, not unexpectedly, also aroused the critics among the physicians, who felt that verdicts of manslaughter ought to be returned against Morison, the real culprit in all the many deaths. Although he remained quietly in the background in all these cases, it was always Morison himself who paid the fines and handled the costs for his agents. Often he did more. When one of his agents, Joseph Webb, was convicted in one of the early trials where the pills were implicated in the death of a patient, Morison conveyed upon him the title of ' First Hygeian Martyr,' and presented him with an elaborate silver platter. The gift had the following inscription :

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To Mr. Joseph Webb of York, first Hygeian martyr, this epergne is presented by contribution from upwards of 48,000 advocates for the medical liberty of the subject and enemies to persecution this 12th day of January, 1835.[67]

Underlying the continual battle between Morison and the medical establishment was the crucial issue of medical liberty. This subject, so dear to the minds of 19th century British society, was but a part of the overall concern for individual liberty and for a laissez-faire approach in both political and economic life. Support for such an unfettered approach came from a string of economists and philosophers, including Adam Smith, John Locke, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, as well as from individuals who were concerned solely about such problems as they pertained to the public health. Medical liberty (or its opposite, restriction) was concerned with the sale of poisons and adulterated drugs, quarantine restrictions, sanitation requirements, the regulation of asylums and madhouses, and perhaps most important of all, with efforts at ' limitation ' by licensure or otherwise, of professional practice to qualified, practitioners.'[68] As such, it was of direct concern to Morison and his followers. Both in his own writings and in the pages of *The Hygeist*, there was a continual barrage of propaganda including essays, poems and testimonials designed to point up the necessity for such liberty. As efforts for medical reform were pressed in the 1850's, with their concomitant drive to prohibit the non-qualified from advising on medical matters, new heights of invective were reached. Proposals for such reform were, for example, an ' attempt to enslave the mind in medical matters which, as in religion, should be left perfectly free . . .'[69] In medicine, as in art, it was important to know what one liked.

5. *The Business*

By the time Morison died in 1840, his pills were on the market in the U.S.A., France, Germany and several smaller markets, in addition to the countries in the British Isles. As the business progressed in the latter years of the nineteenth century, other markets were added as well. Pildoras de Morison were included in the *Farmacopea Official Espanola* at the beginning of the 20th century ; they were included in medicine chests used in Germany, and they were the subject of poems and articles published in France. Morison, who had lived in France for several years after his return from the West Indies, and whose first wife was French, was undoubtedly eager to launch his product on the French market after its early success in England. After all, why should other citizens be denies the virtues of the Vegetable Universal Medicine ? He moved to Paris in 1834 at a moment that was coincident with a series of court cases where his agents were being indicted and invariably found guilty. Shortly after arriving, he entered into a business venture with a physician, Dr.

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Lapouge, and a pharmacist, M. Blain (the French law, then as now requiring a pharmacist to be a principal in drug manufacturing) to create a market for the pills, but despite the efforts of this triumvirate, initial sale response of ' les pilules de Morison ' was slow. Morison was even forced to hold up on some payments to his associates, prompting them to haul him into court, a circumstance which moved *Lancet* to wryly note ' how dreadful is the liberty of the subject infringed upon in France, where a quack is not permitted to poison his neighbours with impunity.'[70] The pills were introduced onto the market in Nova Scotia in 1846, by a request of a member of the Assembly to permit them to be imported duty free. This ' produced a good deal of merriment ' according to the newspaper account of the debate on the question. It seems the members had heard of Morison's Pills before, and were pleased to recount some of their many exploits, mostly imaginary, including their effects on a lady in Sydney who ' was unaccountably found to be in a delicate condition,' and attributed this result to ' the peculiar virtues of this celebrated medicine.'[71]

In all his markets, Morison's primary promotional strategy was to publicize the virtues of his pills by the use of the printed word. Indeed, right at the outset of his business, he issued seven pamphlets, all merely promotional pieces for the pills, and all bearing the same date, 1825. *Morisoniana,* a collection of the major part of his writings, was first issued in 1829 (2nd edition ; no copy of the first edition has been located), and the 1831 edition of this work ran to more than 600 closely printed pages. There was little novelty in his basic approach, for pioneering efforts in the use of print advertising had already taken place in England in the eighteenth century. But with Morison it was the volume of advertising used, and once he got started, a series of books, pamphlets, brochures, almanacs, broadsides, posters and other hand-outs all were used to spread the virtues of the Vegetable Universal Medicine. Such a plethora of publicity prompted the *London Medical Gazette* to note :

> We can scarcely go into any street in London in which we do not see " ' Morison's Universal Pills ' for the cure of every disease" staring us in large letters in the windows of one or more shops.[14]

The weight of advertising was also used as a club to silence opposition. Of course, this technique could not be expected to be successful in all cases, but with some publishers of relatively low ethical standards, revenue from advertising could influence editorial positions. For example, between 1832 and 1836, the comic weekly *Figaro in London* had little good to say about Morison. It noted, in 1835, that his partner Moat had died by ' testing the physic of the firm.'[72] One year later, a long article began by calling the Hygeian System outright quackery, and continued,

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> So far from being a College of Health, their establishment ought rather to be called the Temple of Death . . . we have given to the Hygeists such a smashing as will do more towards stopping the sale of these foul, damnable and most diabolical pills, than all the coroners inquests and verdicts of manslaughter that have each been recorded by British Jurymen.[73]

Suddenly, in 1837, the criticisms end, and indeed there are some statements defending Morison against Wakeley and other reformers. At the same time there are some advertisements for Morison's Pills. It is difficult not to comment on the coincidence.

One of the key elements in all these writings was the use of testimonials, actively solicited from all sources to tell the world of the virtues of the pills. Morison's agents were actively implored to obtain more and more of these hymns of praise to the pills, and a continuing barrage of papers reviewing such cases was issued for public consumption. Of course, it could not be expected that such testimonials would provide ' fair balance ' in the contemporary meaning of the term, but this was never Morison's intention. Complaints by his medical critics,

> While the daily prints are filled with lying histories of ' successful cases ' calculated to entrap the grossly ignorant, not a line is inserted to warn the unwary of their danger.[14]

did little to stem the tide of continuing favourable reports. At one point, the testimonials were justified by noting that ' the proverb says the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and it holds with pills as well as with puddings.'[74] Regularly issued journals were published too, to provide a forum for matters of importance to Morison and the British College of Health. The most effective and long lived of these, *The Hygeist*, first appeared after Morison's death, in 1842, but it was preceeded by *The Hygeian Journal*, a record of the progress of Hygeianism in Scotland, edited by James Greer, M.D., in 1833.

The second major media used by Morison, in addition to print, was salesmen, or, as he preferred to call them, agents. In the beginning, each of these agents was a layman, and the British College of Health took particular pains to note that none was an apothecary or member of any other of the recognised health professions. But later on, in the 1850's, chemists and druggists did begin to stock and distribute the pills. Each agent was given a specific territory and was held responsible for all Morison's activities there. They called on prospective clients, advised on the treatment of various illnesses, stocked and supplied the pills on demand, gave the lectures on such topics as ' The Hygeian or Morisonian system of midecine shown to be in accordance with nature,' handed out literature in the fight for ' the cause of truth against error,' and, in short, did everything possible to stimulate sales of the pills.[75] There were many of them ; in 1833, a list of agents in England covered 24 octavo pages, and

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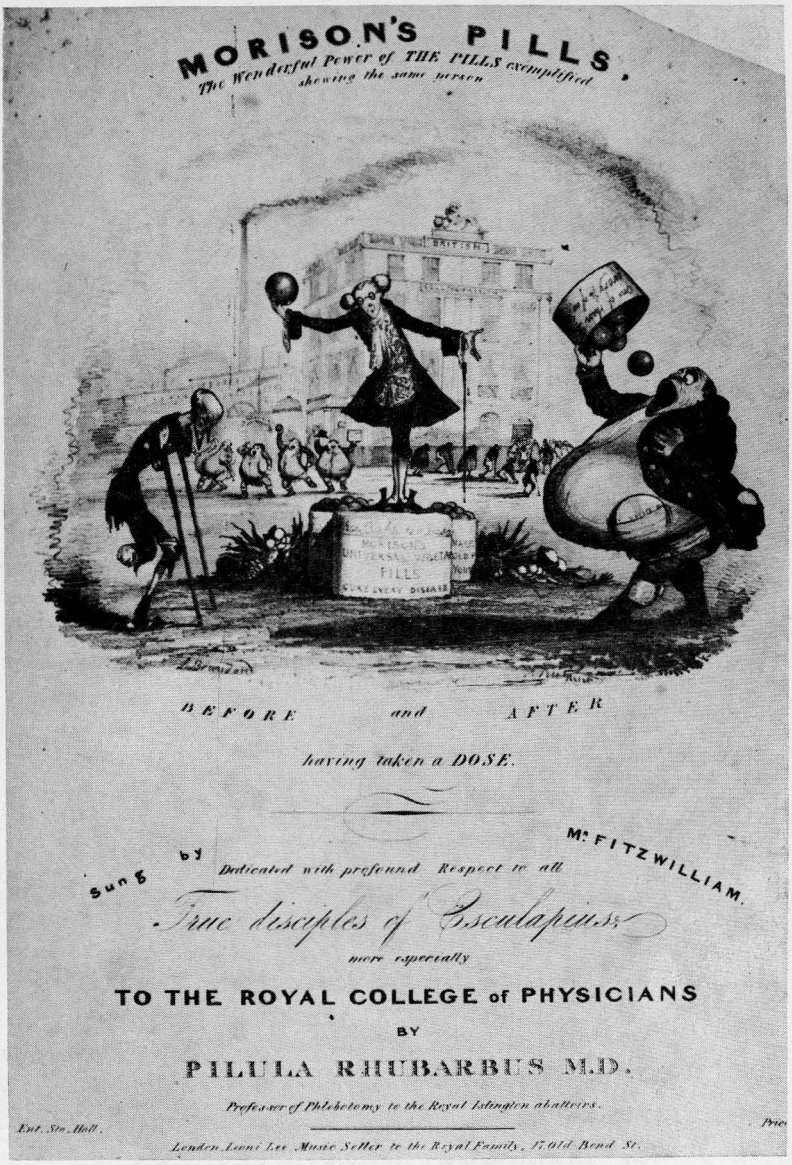

V. COVER OF THE SHEET MUSIC OF 'MORISON'S PILLS'

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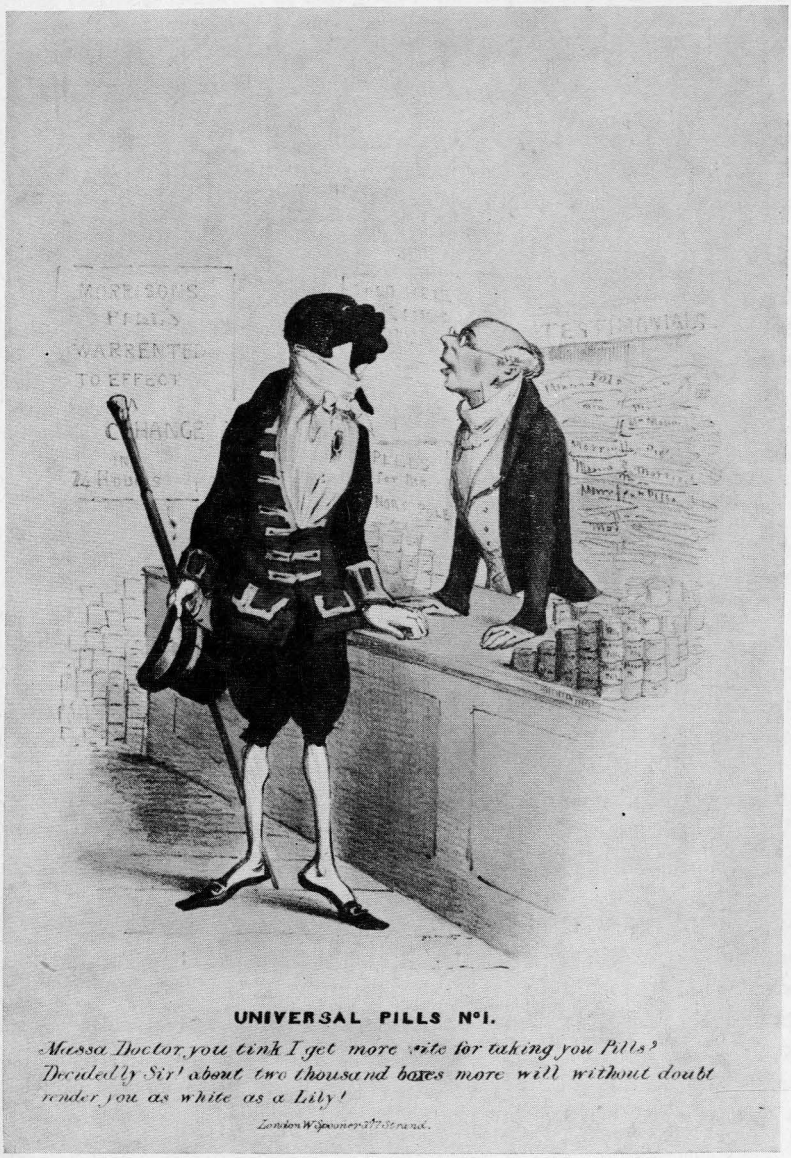

VI. CARICATURE : UNIVERSAL PILLS NO. 1
(see item 16 in the caricature check list)

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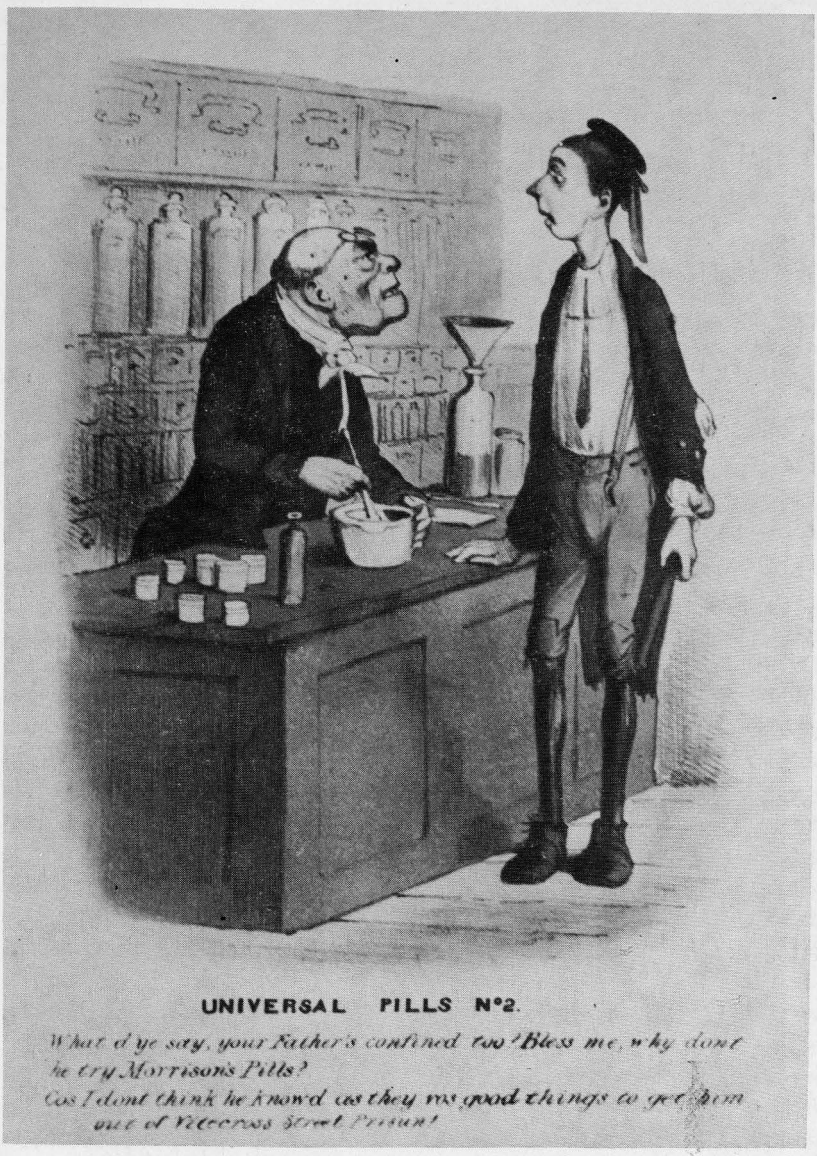

VII. CARICATURE : UNIVERSAL PILLS NO. 2
(see item 17 in the caricature check list)

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VIII. CARICATURE : UNIVERSAL PILLS NO. 3
(see item 18 in the caricature check list)

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there were still others in the U.S.A., Ireland, Scotland and Wales.[76] Some of these worked out of official depots ; others merely from their homes. To fill the ranks of salesmen, a continuing campaign was carried out for recruitment. One of the advertisements soliciting agents solemnly states that :

> many applications are made by clergymen . . . in order to administer (the pills) gratuitously to their poor neighbors, Messrs. Morison, Moat & Co. will be happy to assist them in this benevolent purpose . . .[77]

After 1840, when the business of the British College of Health passed to his sons Alexander (1809—1879) and John (1812—1886), the basic promotional themes of James Morison were continued almost without change. But there were, in addition, further novel approaches developed to keep up with the promotional pace of the Victorian era. The product line was expanded to include a powder, an ointment, and in France, a ' poudre pour limonade Morison.'[78] A medal was struck to honour the founder of the Hygeian System, and there were other premiums developed along the same lines. An essay contest was devoted to the defence of the medical liberty of the subject, and the pages of *The Hygeist* were used to print the winning entries as well as poems and odes on the same theme. Several petitions were drawn up and submitted to Parliament calling attention to the virtues of the pills. One of these, in 1847, was prepared as an effort to condemn the use of poisons, i.e. ingredients of non-vegetable origin as medicines ; it was signed by almost 20,000 people.[79] This idea, however, was not really new to the company, for several earlier petitions, one demanding an inquiry into the merits of the Hygeian System, sent to the House of Commons in 1838 with more than 10,000 signatures, and another as early as 1827 requesting permission for Morison to practice on soldiers in hospitals, had preceeded these efforts.[49] And, to top it all off, a statue was erected to the glory of James Morison on the grounds of the British College of Health on Euston Road. The statue was the brainchild of an agent of the company, W. Manneville, who first suggested it at a meeting of the College in 1851 ; his letter formally presenting the idea was later printed in *The Hygeist* in November, 1851.[80] It was to be created from contributions of no more than a penny each given by those who had taken the pills themselves with positive results and were therefore grateful to Morison for his great discovery. While the fund raising campaign was going on, *Punch*, the humour weekly, put forth several possible designs, including a simple slab of stone erected in the churchyard fullest of the Doctor's late patients,[81] or possibly one of ' monumental brass,' that being the material closest in character to Morison himself. In putting forth possible reasons why the monument should be erected, those chosen included the fact that he was one of the most remarkable pillers (*sic*) of

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society, that he had good knowledge of what people would swallow, that he sent forth his pills in numbers, that he dealt out many a death blow in pursuit of his object, and that he contributed to many undertakings.[82] The final design was not very imaginative—a couchant British lion resting on a plinth of Portland stone which sat atop a grey granite pedestal. Each of the sides of the base had an inscription. One of them carried the text from Hamlet in which the ghost of Hamlet's father tells of his poisoning by his brother, a reference to Morison's concern for purity of the blood and his continuing stand against drugs of non-vegetable origin.[83] Another listed the main points of the Hygeian System, and a third recorded details of the various petitions which had been sent to parliament. The front said simply that the statue ' raised by penny subscription, was erected in AD 1855 to James Morison the Hygeist.' The monument was finally erected on 31 March, 1856, ' the auspicious day on which the peace of Europe was proclaimed,' as the readers of *The Hygeist* were modestly told not long thereafter.[84] It remained on the site opposite St. Pancras Station until the widening of Euston Road in the late 1920's caused it to be torn down. Under John Morison, the campaign of the British College of Health against vaccination and its evils became quite active. Broadsides, articles, prints and pamphlets were issued warning of its grave dangers, with such publicity reaching its peak after the passage of the Compulsory Vaccination Bill in 1861. Even a play was published.[85]

How much business did Morison do ? From all outward appearances and from the comments of his critics, he was obviously very successful, but specific figures are hard to obtain. One source noted that Morison made £80,000 a year toward the end of his life and he left a will amounting to approximately £500,000.[86] Another source, basing its estimate on the number of tax stamps used, notes that more than 800,000,000 pills had been sold between 1825 and January 1849, with £115,000 paid for the tax stamps alone.[87] At 1½d. per stamp, this comes to more than 18,000,000 stamps. To the number of pills noted in this estimate must be added those given away as samples or to those who could not afford to pay ; were these to be included the total would approach a billion pills over this 24 year period. And, as if this quantity were not enough, the British College of Health repeatedly complained in advertisements that there were counterfeit stamps at large, and that imposters were thus jeopardizing the health of the people.[88]

6. *The Critics*

Morison's brazen approach did not stop at arousing a response from the medical profession and its journalists alone, for his widespread promotional efforts during the 1830's were bound to have an impact on other groups as well. His name, and the famous Morison's Pills, quickly became a household word in the same way that Anderson's Pills and Daffy's Elixir

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had before him, Thomas Beecham's Pills did at the end of the 19th century, or as Dudley Le Blanc's (the proprietor of Hadacol) did in the U.S.A. at the close of the Second World War. Morison's fame inspired authors, poets, song writers and cartoonists who have, in their own way, each contributed, for the most part, contemptuously and negatively, to his lasting reputation. And this criticism even peristed after his death. A song, *Morison's Pills*, was published around 1835,

> Dedicated with profound respect to all True disciples of Esculapius, more especially to the Royal College of Physicians by Pilula Rhubarbus, M.D., Professor of Phlebotomy to the Royal Islington Abattoirs.[89]

with a very catchy melody and 8 verses, the first and fifth of which give some indication of its aesthetic value.*

> You may talk as you will of the good olden times—
> But give me your reasons—I'll answer in rhymes—
> Did our forefathers once in their wisdom e'er dream
> Of rail-roads, balloons—or of gaslight and steam ?
> What know the most knowing of fifty years back
> Of Rowland's Macassar and Warren's jet black—
> But, worst of all wants in the midst of their ills
> Could they fly for comfort to Morison's pills.
>
> Some people take now a very high tone
> And see in this drug the Philosopher's stone
> Reviving the Alchemist's art and his skill
> Their elixir of Life is a Morison's pill.
> There's one thing quite certain that Folly and wealth
> Have turn'd dross into gold at the College of Health :
> Give way ye slow-workers—ye jalaps and squills
> To "Perpetual Motions" and Morison's pills.

A completely different song entitled "The Vegetable Pills" was published in Preston at about the same time, and, coincidentally, contained eight verses also. This song played a prominent part in the plot development of a one act play by Robert Wilkie, *The Yalla Gaiters, or a Rare Discovery on the Banks of the Moy*, in which the hero, one Mr. Wealthy, drops and loses in a river his prized possession, a pair of yellow leather overshoes. At the moment he dropped them, he became :

> fascinated with the exquisite strains of a countryman passing by, who was celebrating in song the merits of "Morison's Pills". He listened with such delight, that he forgot the absence of his gaiters, which, in the interim, were quietly floating down the Moy.[90]

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*A footnote to the 2nd verse notes ' It is said that two steam-engines are now employed in the manufacture, we beg pardon, we mean in the accurate preparation of Morison's prescriptions.'

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Heady stuff, this. It is not as well done as the song by ' Pilula Rhubarbus,' as examples of the first and last verses will show :

> Of all the wonders we have read since first the world began,
> The greatest lately has appear'd and Morrison's the man ;
> No longer death we need to fear, or labour under ills,
> For ev'ry disease is cured by "The Vegetable Pills".
>
> In short the blind may gain their sight, the dumb may find a tongue,
> The lame may quickly run a race, the old again be young,
> One dose will make you laugh or cry, the hungry belly fills,
> In fact, if you would never die, take the Vegetable Pills.[91]

As befitted a man of such renown, Morison is also thought to have inspired a children's limerick :

> There was a young salesman of Leeds
> Rashly swallowed six packets of seeds
> When a month came to pass
> He was covered with grass
> And he couldn't sit down for the weeds.

One of the better efforts in verse, *The Devil Prime Minister*, was a bitter attack on Wellington, then in office. In it, the Devil assumed the role of Morison and created the famous pill. The verse notes

> Broken legs, broken arms, nay, if crushed in a mill
> You had only to swallow the Vegetable Pill,
> . . . . . .
> Now rushed the old ladies to freshen their blood,
> And they swallowed the pills and they swore they were good ;
> They took them by boxes, in fifties and dozens,
> And wrote to their nephews, their nieces, and cousins,

and concludes

> Thus one fool makes many, and the Devil confessed
> That of all trades a quack's was the easiest and best.[92]

There was also a lengthy verse that George Cruikshank published in which he ridiculed the pill by dwelling on the ingredients, some fanciful, in it

> Take gamboge, as you find it, for better for worse,
> And aloes,—the strongest,—a drug for a horse,
> A few peppermint drops, a few turns of a mill,
> And you get the contents of the Wonderful Pill.

Then, after adding to this list of ingredients some of animal origin, the poet commented

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Take of folly, stupidity, weakness—enough :—
Of credulity, ignorance, fear, quantum suff :—
These ingredients, combin'd with discernment & Skill,
Give the knave and the dupe of the Wonderful Pill.[93]

Earlier, in a caricature published in 1833, *The Fox and the Goose*, Cruikshank had again used a poem with five stanzas, the first of which noted :

A fox there is who has such knowledge
That his dwelling house he calls a "College"
And geese flock to him from all quarters
Bringing wives & sons & daughters
He tells the geese, that their ills he's able
To cure with his pills of vegetable.

Cruikshank found in Morison a ripe target for his incisive wit. The pills appear in several other engravings, in addition to *The Fox and the Goose*, *The Sick Goose and the Council of Health*, and *Morison's Pills—a great reduction on taking a quantity*. They were also noted in a segment of a panorama that Cruikshank published several years before the Exhibition of 1850. And, in his *Comic Almanac*, he often parodied Morison's promotional excesses. In 1835 he awarded Morison a prize ' for the discovery of the perpetual motion.'[94] Later he reported that Morison :

> was elected principal of Brazen-Noze College on presenting to its library a copy of his treatise on assurance, with tables of the average termination of life, as deduced from the last returns of the Pills of Mortality.[95]

Thomas Carlyle, writing in 1843, used Morison's single cause and single cure theory of health and disease as the fulcrum on which to base his own wish that such a possibility could also exist for the ills of the political world and the solution to all its problems. But Carlyle was forced to note, spelling Morison's name wrong in the process :

> I am sorry I have got no Morrison's Pill for curing the maladies of Society. It were infinitely handier if we had aMorrison's Pill, Act of Parliament, or remedial measure, which men could swallow, one good time, and then go on their old courses, cleared from all miseries and mischiefs ! Unluckily we have none such ; unluckily the Heavens themselves, in their rich pharmacopoeia, contain none such.[96]

In even stronger words, Carlyle finally rejected the concept altogether :

> Not any universal Morrison's Pill shall we then, either as swallowers or as venders, ask after at all ; but a far different sort of remedies : Quacks shall no more have dominion over us, but true Heroes and Healers !

Carlyle also used the pills as a springboard for his comments on religion, in addition to his political statements. In an essay, *Morrison Again*, he employed basically the same analogy :

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> They fancy that their religion too shall be a kind of Morrison's Pill, which they have only to swallow once and all will be well. Resolutely once gulp down your religion, your Morrison's Pill, you have it all plain sailing . . . Brother, I say there is not, was not, nor ever will be, in the wide circle of Nature, any Pill, or Religion of that character . . . I advise thee to renounce Morrison ; once or all, quit hope of the Universal Pill.[97]

This metaphor of Carlyle's was taken up by a critic in *Punch* several years later in an article likening the Hygeian or Morisonian System to the European political system. Thus, where Morison noted that ' all constitutions are radically the same, *Punch* noted that all Constitutions are radically in the same predicament. While, according to Morison, acrimonious humours were in the body, they prevailed, according to *Punch*, in the body politic. Echoing Carlyle, the writer added :

> When we turn to the remedy which the genius of Morison suggests, we find that a ' Vegetable Compound ' was the real desideratum ; and this Morison discovered. We only wish we knew a vegetable compound which would cure the disorders of Europe.[98]

Edgar Allan Poe also used Morison's Pills, or at least the expected unwelcomed side-effects from taking the pills, in giving advice to an author in describing experiences of great mental and physical anguish. "Hanging is somewhat hacknied. Perhaps you might do better. Take a dose of Morrison's Pills, and then give us your sensations", was his recommendation on how to rival de Quincey.[99]

But of all Morison's critics, it was the caricaturists of the day who had the best of it. At least 25 caricatures were published during the 1830's by Cruikshank, C. J. Grant, and others, which made fun of Morison's claims of effectiveness, his extensive advertising, or, most often, the singular side effects that could occur when one took too many pills. Many of them showed these awful effects, usually in the form of carrots, radishes, cucumbers and other vegetables sprouting from the unfortunate victim's nose, ears, mouth and other parts of his anatomy. Some even used Morison or his pills to make some political point as well.*

And finally, this is perhaps as good a way as any for us now to remember this man of so many excesses—to see the same excesses finally getting the better of him. The proud boast made in response to all this criticism, that ' Mr. James Morison will be remembered long after *Punch* is forgotten ' has, after all, turned out to be rather empty.[100]

***Note**

A check list of some of these caricatures is presented in the appendix.

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IX. CARICATURE : UNIVERSAL PILLS NO. 4
(see item 19 in the caricature check list)

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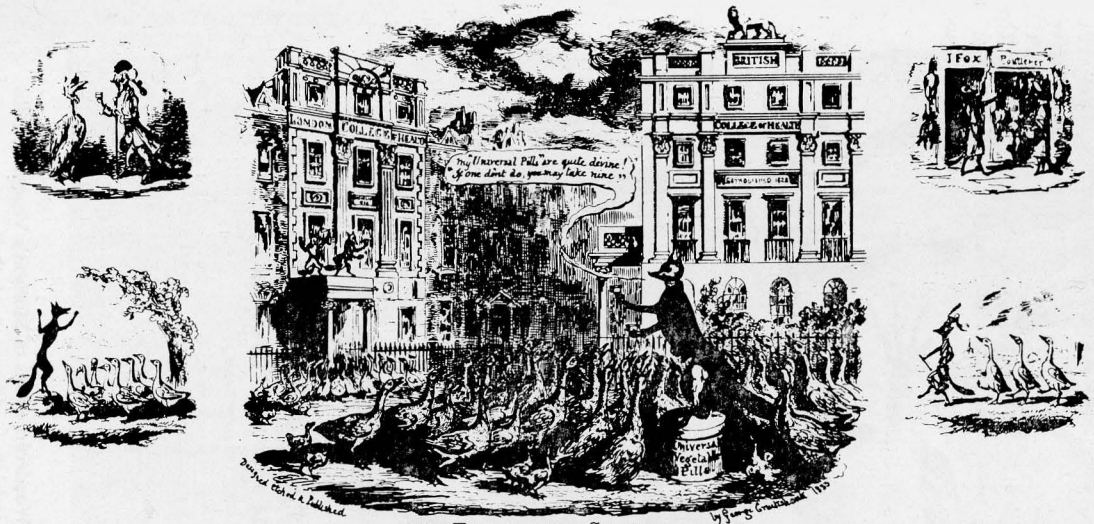
X. Caricature : The life of a British sailor saved by Morison's Pill box (see item 8 in caricature check list)

https://doi.org/10.24355/dbbs.084-201802201045



The FOX and the GOOSE.

A Fox there is who has such Knowledge
That his Dwelling House he calls a "COLLEGE"
And Geese flock to him from all quarters
Bringing Wives & Sons & Daughters
He tells the Geese, that their ills he's able
To cure with his Pills of Vegetable

And so Goose thanks he can, good lack!
For "Cackle" hath great faith in "Quack"—
So he lives on GOOSE each day I ween,
His House is built on "Ganders Green,"
His Carriage Wheels on "Goose Grease" turn,
He Fat of Goose for oil doth burn.

He plucks their feathers for his Bed,
On Down of Goose he lays his head.
He gets his Goose & eke his Stuffing
By Cramming Geese with Pills & Puffing.
He writes his Puffs with "Grey Goose quill"
Of "Goose-berry-fool" he has his fill.

He makes GOOSE pay his "COLLEGE" rent!
And calls himself the "President"!

And not in trifles over nice
'Tis he himself enacts the "Vice"!!

And tho' 'tis strange 'tis also true
He is himself the "Members" too!!!

Another "COLLEGE" there is I ween
Which may in Newman Street be seen

And there two Foxes "Charles & John",
Carry the very same System on.

XI. THE FOX AND THE GOOSE.
A caricature by George Cruikshank
(see item 7 in caricature check list)

https://doi.org/10.24355/dbbs.084-201802201045

XII. Caricature : The Wonderful effects of Morison's Vegetable Pills
(see item 20 in the caricature check list)

https://doi.org/10.24355/dbbs.084-201802201045

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Caricatures on James Morison and Morison's Pills

A Check List

The following list gives brief information on the caricatures which appeared during the period from 1830 to 1850 on James Morison or Morison's Pills. It makes no pretense at completeness, for the wealth of material published in England during this period both as separate prints and in newspapers and journals makes this impossible. Nor does it include other prints which relate to Morison such as portraits, illustrations of offices and buildings of the British College of Health, or the Hygeian Illustrations which were, in the main, published after his death.

1. Advice to Costermongers Gratis. Anonymous colored lithograph, c. 1835. A smug looking farmer, smoking a pipe, and with his arms folded, is seated on a donkey. From the ears, mouth, tail, etc. . . . of the donkey sprout turnips, cabbages, onions and other vegetables. The text under the title notes ' How to set up in business—Give your hanimal a feed of Morrissons Wegetable Pills and you will have no occasion to go to Common Garden blow me ! ! ! See Short, 1961, p. 4.

2. The Arts and Manufactures of the Medical Profession and the Marvels of the British College of Health. Colored engraving by George Cruikshank of a small segment of a panorama, ' The Great Exhibition wot is to be—1850 ' c. 1840. Five men are shown in the segment. The first two are having an argument, as a result of which one of them cries. Next to them is a man holding a huge mortar and pestle. He is ' Disconsolate Apothecary with pestle and mortar reversed.' Then comes a figure holding a huge prescription signed by J. M sn, M.D., calling for Ars. alb, Nux. vom., Merc. & prus. ac. This is ' A real prescription, Price £ 1/1. Expected, in a few years, to be as valuable for its rarity as any Manuscript in the British Museum.' Finally, there is a man holding a board on the top of his head on which are six flasks containing the ingredients of the prescription such as ' Arsenic,' ' Nux Vomica, ' ' Prussic Acid,' and there is also one of ' Opium ' and one of ' Morphine.' These are ' Prize specimens of the stock in Trade of Doctor's Shops.'

3. Awful effects of Morrison's Vegetable Pills. Colored lithograph by C. J. Grant, November 5, 1835. A gouty man, his bandaged right foot resting on a cushion, holds one side of a mirror while his wife holds the other side. As he looks into the mirror he notices his face to be covered with spots. In the background a fire burns. The woman exclaims ' Oh ! Lawk a daisy me ! Look here sir ! Why you are cover'd all over with Grass ! !—I shoudd'nt at all wonder if it isn't taking so many of them Wegetable Pills. They have no doubt taken root in your inside, & you sitting so long by the fire have made 'em Wegetate thro' your skin ! ! See Hamarneh, 1970, p. 218 ; Helfand, 1967, p. 24 (No. 66).

4. Bubbles of the Year—Patent Life Pills. Black & White engraving by John Leech, January 4, 1845. From Punch, Almanac for 1845—June. Father Time as Old Paar is shown shooting a cannon of pills at people to give them long life. Among the medicines shown are ' Morisom,' ' Paars Life Pills,' and ' Holloway Ointment.'

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5. Eccentricities No. V. Anonymous colored lithograph, 1838. A sick man, seated in a chair, is talking to a woman. On a table at the right are eight or more boxes of Morison's Pills. The man says ' Oh man I've got so thin, that only one person can see me at a time.'

6. Extraordinary Effects of Morrison's Vegetable Pills. Colored lithograph by C. J. Grant, June 10, 1834. Two men, one with wooden legs and supporting himself on crutches, the other holding a pair of wooden legs under his arms, discuss the improvement in the latter's condition. The reason, as the text explains, is that '. . . I bought a Box of Morrison Uniwersal Wegetable Pills, for a Swelling in my Thighs . . .' and overnight his legs were restored. See Helfand, 1967, p. 25 (No. 69) ; Rosenthal, 1953, p. 44 (No. 430) ; Wellcome, 1945 (No. 27).

7. The Fox and the Goose. Black and White engraving by George Cruikshank, 1833. In the center, a fox dressed in a morning coat holds boxes of pills in each hand and says ' My "Universl Pills" are quite devine ! If one don't do, you may take nine. A large number of geese are listening to his spiel. He stands on a box labeled ' Universal Vegetable Pills.' In the background is the ' London College of Health,' with two other foxes standing on the portico ; opposite it is the building of the ' British College of Health established 1828.' Four smaller prints of foxes and geese surround the main one. Under the illustrations are five stanzas of verse. See Helfand, 1967, p. 24 (No. 67) ; Jameson, 1961, p. 120 ; Veth, 1925, p. 146.

8. The Life of a British Sailor saved by Morison's Pill Box. Anonymous colored lithograph, 1838. A sailor is shown in a box marked ' Morrison's Pills for Exportation.' The text notes, ' never go to sea without a large box of Morrison's pills they will save your life said the doctor and sure his honor, was right and no mistake. When we were wrecked and all aboard perished I swallow'd the pills jumped into the box, and here I am going with a fair wind safe ashore.'

9. Morison's Pills—A great reduction on taking a quantity. Black and white engraving by George Cruikshank, 1849. From the Comic Almanac. A patient, sitting in a chair, is shown taking Morison's Pills. He is thin, but there is a picture of him on the wall showing that at one time he was obese.

10. Morison's Pills the True Life Preserver. Anonymous colored lithograph, c. 1838. Shows a sailor riding on a box of ' Morison's Pills for Sea Service.' At the same time, other drowning men, who take other medicines, are calling for help.

11. Morsels of Mirth No. 2, colored lithograph by C. J. Grant, c. 1835. The print is a series of vignettes grouped around a larger central illustration entitled ' Extraordinary effects of the vegetable pills in a tailor, who having cabbaged to a great extent, was taken ill & after swallowing 130 boxes of the aforesaid pills, presented the above phenomenon.' The tailor's nose is turning into a cabbage leaf while his wife, holding a knife, looks on.

12. The Newest Universal Medicine. Black and white lithograph by John Doyle, July 27, 1837. A political caricature, showing Lord Durham as a pharmacist, using a mortar and pestle behind a prescription counter. There are bottles of ' conservative opiate,' ' radical alcohol ' and ' whig alkalai ' on the counter, and some boxes on chairs, addressed to newspapers and to Daniel O'Connell, the Irish leader in Parliament. The title refers to the newest nostrum which has succeeded others with very wide claims, such as Turner's mustard seeds, St. John Long's

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embrocation, and Morison's Pills. As he stirs, Durham says ' Now to extinguish that quack Morison ! ' See Doyle, 1841, p. 343.

13. The Sick Goose and the Council of Health. Black and white engraving by George Cruikshank, 1847. From the Comic Almanac. Nine figures, shown as animated forms of objects such as clysters, medicine bottles, etc. . . . attend a sick goose. They prescribe various remedies, including ' Parr's Life Pills,' ' Morison's Vegetable Pills,' etc. . . . See Veth, 1925, p. 5.

14. Singular Effects of the Universal Vegetable Pills on a Green Grocer. Colored lithograph by C. J. Grant, May 8, 1841. A grocer, having taken an excessive amount of the pills, sees different vegetables sprout from various parts of his body. The text notes that he was ' . . . order'd to live for the space of one Month upon Vegetable Diet & to Take during that time 132 Boxes of Vegetable Pills for the cure of a Gangreen & being caught in a Shower of Rain . . . presented the above Phenomenon of a Moving Kitchen Garden.' See Helfand, 1967, p. 24 (No. 68) ; Trimmer, 1964, p. 31.

15. Sudden Breaking up of a Consultation. Colored lithograph by C. J. Grant, c. 1835. A group of physicians are shown arguing and fighting over the treatment to be provided for an extremely ill patient who sits in a chair and observes the battle. The various pills he has taken are on a table, and some have fallen to the floor during the melee. Among these nostrums are Morison's and Leake's Pills.

16. Universal Pills No. 1. Anonymous colored lithograph, c. 1835. The sign on the wall of a pharmacy notes that ' Morrison's pills warranted to effect a change in 24 hours.' This has prompted a black man to ask the pharmacist if ' . . . you tink I get more vite for taking you pills ? ' The reply is ' Decidedly, sir, about two thousand boxes more will without doubt render you white as a lily.' The counter top has a display o' boxes of the pills, and an entire section behindthe counter is devoted to ' testimonials.

17. Universal Pills No. 2. Anonymous colored lithograph, c. 1835. Because a tall young boy tells a pharmacist that his father is confined, Morison's pills are prescribed. But the boy notes that they might not be good enough to get his father out of prison. The pharmacist is shown behind his counter on which are several boxes of pills, bottles, a mortar and pestle, etc. . . . See Hein 1964, p. 90 (No. 63).

18. Universal Pills No. 3. Anonymous colored lithograph, c. 1835. A fat man holds a pole on which is placed a drawing of a thin young man. He notes ' this here Board is a hexact representation of me as I was afore I took to Morrison s pills and only took 480 boxes ! ! I lived on nothink else for a vortnight.'

19. Universal Pills No. 4. Anonymous colored lithograph, c. 1835. A man, surveying himself in a mirror, sees his nose become a carrot. He notes that the ' Vegetable pills have taken root in my nose. It was reddish before but now its carroty.'

20. Wonderful Effect of Morrison's Vegetable Pills. Anonymous colored lithograph, 1838. A woman, standing before a mirror, sees parts of her body turn into vegetables. Her head has become an onion, her legs carrots, etc. . . . The text notes ' they told me if I took 1000 pills at night I should be quite another *thing* in the morning.'

21. The Wonderful Power of the Pills Exemplified Showing the Same Person Before & After Having Taken a Dose. Black and white lithograph by L. Brandard, c. 1835.

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A man, standing on a box of Morison's Universal Vegeta . . . Pills, and holding one in his hand, is extolling the virtues of the pills. Before him stand an emaciated one legged creature on crutches (' before ') and an obese glutton, swallowing the contents of a box (' after '). The box from which he takes the pills is labelled ' one of these boxes every $\frac{1}{4}$ of an hour.'
Note : This lithograph is also used on the cover of the song ' Morison's Pills, The wonderful power of the pills exemplified . . .' See Matthews 1957, p. 481.

22. Whoy Robin lad wot be'st thee at ? Anonymous colored lithograph, 1836. Two men are in a garden, one holding a box of pills and dropping several of them on cabbages. One says, ' Whoy Robin lad wot be'st thee at ? ' and the reply notes that '. . . these cabbages be eaten nearly all up, and I be zoing zum o' them wegitable pills. They cur'd I o' the worms. Zo I means try when em'll do for the cabbages.

References for Caricature Check List

DOYLE, 1841	J. DOYLE, *An Illustrative Key to the Political Sketches of H.B.*, London, 1841
HAMARNEH, 1970	S. HAMARNEH, Pharmacy in Prints, *Journal of the American Pharmaceutical Association*, 1970, NS 10, 4, April 1970, 216
HEIN, 1964	W. H. HEIN, *Die Pharmazie in der Karikatur*, Ingelheim, 1964
HELFAND, 1967	W. H. HELFAND, *Drugs and Pharmacy in Prints*, Phila., 1967
JAMESON, 1961	E. JAMESON, *The Natural History of Quackery*, London, 1961
MATTHEWS, 1957	L. G. MATTHEWS, Pharmacy in Song, *Pharmaceutical Journal*, 1957, Dec. 21, p. 480
ROSENTHAL, 1953	E. ROSENTHAL, Ed. *The Story of Medicine in Art*, Millwaukee, 1953
SHORT, 1961	A. L. SHORT, Englische Pharmaceutische Karikaturen, *Zur Geschichte der Pharmazie*, 1961, 13 (1), 4
TRIMMER, 1964	E. J. TRIMMER, Menace of the Mountebank, *Abbotempo*, 1964, 2 (4), 30
VETH, 1925	C. VETH, *De Arts in de Caricatuur*, Amsterdam, 1925
WELLCOME, 1965	WELLCOME *Museum Catalogue of Exhibition on Pharmacy*, London, September, 1965.

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DR. JAMES'S FEVER POWDER

by J. K. Crellin

Dr. James's Fever Powder provides an interesting contrast with Morison's pills. Patented by Dr. (a Cambridge M.D.) Robert James in 1747,[1] the powder had a much longer history surviving until well into this century, even though, unlike the pills, it could not capitalise on growing disquiet with mercurial and antimonial preparations of which it was a notable example.[2] The long history of the powder thus raises many questions, some of which will be considered in this note, as to how its popularity was achieved.

As with Morison's pills the fame of James's Powder undoubtedly owed much to publicity and advertising—both good and bad. The latter commenced very shortly after James was awarded his patent when a Walter Baker announced that James's preparation was none other than that prepared by an "ingenious chemist", William Schwanberg. The controversy led to a great deal of claims, counter-claims and litigation, and, on the information now available, it is virtually impossible to thread one's way satisfactorily through the many testimonials supporting one side or the other and to assess who deserved justice.[3] However, James won the day on the grounds that his preparation was different from Schwanberg's and certainly a study (cf. below) of the chemical evidence presented by him and by Baker apparently justifies this verdict.

Another piece of notorious publicity—which came in 1774, after the powder was well established—is well known, namely the belief that Oliver Goldsmith's premature death at the age of forty-six was due to his insistence, despite medical advice, on taking the powder. The apothecary, William Hawes, gave a contemporary account of the episode (and his own part in it) and added warnings on the dangers of excessive use of the powder, and using it precipitously at the commencement of every fever.[4] Here he was echoing—though less forcibly—the remarks of physician Malcolm Flemyng. In 1760 Flemyng, while "generally favourable to the powder", emphasised that it was a dangerous medicine and not a cure-all for all fevers. It was necessary, he concluded, for everyone, especially physicians, to be "cautious in advising and directing the exhibition of brisk and churlish medicines ; lest, while they charitably intend a benefit they do their neighbour irrepairable damage".[5] Also in 1774 John Millar, in his *Observations on Antimony*, after underlining the dangers of antimonial medicines, argued that, "if the difficulty of conducting the operation of antimony renders the general application of it, in regular practice, dangerous, it must as a secret remedy [i.e. James's Powder], in

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the hands of those who have not medicinal skill, be still more pernicious".[6]

In view of such criticisms one must wonder just how the antimonial Fever Powder became so popular.[7] This owed much to direct advertising —both by James and his sole agent, the renowned bookseller, John Newbery.[8] In common with all 18th and 19th century advertising of medicines, this was outspoken, if not brazen.[9] There was, too, a tremendous amount of unsolicited advertising by the literary world of the 18th century, from Horace Walpole to children's stories such as *Little Goody Two Shoes*, issued and partly written by Newbery.[10] The Powder's fame was such that it was tried on George III in 1788, during the first attack of his celebrated illness, reducing his fever, but not his delirium.[11] It remained in the Royal Circle for many years, being, for example, in Queen Victoria's medicine chest in the 1860's.[12] Such popularity, even among physicians, suggests that there are other explanations than just massive advertising for its success, especially as by Victoria's reign there was an official pharmacopoeial substitute (*Pulvis antimonalis*). Of the latter, Charles J. Payne, writing in 1841, stated that when this was introduced into the (London) Pharmacopoeia in 1787 it was intended to become a "substitute for the . . . expensive [a very valid complaint] and secret [James's Powder]", and "although it has succeeded in supplanting that in very general practice, yet there still exists in the minds of some medical men preference for the original article."[13]

One reason for the popularity, despite such criticisms as those of Millar already mentioned, was the value commonly placed on antimonial medicines. The 17th century trials and tribulations over antimony were all but forgotten by the time of Dr. James and a plethora of antimonial preparations was to be found in 18th century pharmacopoeias and formularies. Additionally, there was a number of proprietary medicines, the formulae of some being secret while others were public knowledge.[14] Much discussion and confusion over efficacy resulted, an unhappy state of affairs compounded by chemical variability among different batches of even well-established preparations.

The popularity of such preparations—widely used for fevers, a major medical problem of the 18th century—owed much to their all round evacuating properties of diaphoresis, emesis and purgation, ideal for affecting humours and restoring their balance as required by the then current humoral theories explaining fevers. Other medical theories to gain consideration and influence—such as the Brunonian theory of John Brown—also advocated the "evacuating" properties of antimonial medicines.[15] James's Powder thus satisfied much current medical thought, its popularity also depending partly on the fact that, in small doses, it was a mild preparation and apparently could produce diaphoresis without emesis, although many critics denied this, stressing its variability of action.[16]

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Another important point in connection with the Powder's popularity was the long history of uncertainty over its composition, which left open the question whether the pharmacopoeial substitute powder was satisfactory. As indicated in Payne's remarks (quoted above) some physicians did not think so, a viewpoint reflected in the widely circulated medicine chest booklet issued by the celebrated John Bell & Co. in the 1860's, which listed James's Powder rather than the *Pulvis antimonalis* of the pharmacopoeia which was included in the majority of other similar booklets.[17] A good indication of the confusion is seen in a statement by James Rennie in his *A New Supplement to the Latest Pharmacopoeias of London, Edinburgh and Paris of* 1837 : "Dr. Paris says, ' experience has established the fact that James's Powder is less active than its [pharmacopoeial] imitation,' but I am almost certain the fact is the reverse."[18]

To appreciate fully this situation it is necessary to look at the attempts at analysis, or at least a few of the many, of James's Powder, and the story of its substitutes. The first analysis took place in connection with the already mentioned controversy between James and Walter Baker.[19] Baker's support for his claim included some experimental work undertaken on 30th September 1751, at Mr. Erasmus King's Experimental Room at Duke's Court, St. Martin's Lane, experiments witnessed by Peter Grandon (gunsmith), Gerard Dewman (doctor of physick), Richard Syddall (chemist), Christopher Gascoign (surgeon), Eramsus King (experimental philosopher), John Holt (mineralogist), Francis Hammond (engraver) and Thomas Worlidge (face painter). The experiments involved comparing the effects on the powders of for instance heat (dry and in alcohol). Similar results obtained with both powders led to the conclusion that they were one and the same. James defended himself from the accusation of fraud not only with defammatory remarks about Baker's capabilities—saying that he was not a chemist, merely a journey-man printer who had worked for the printer of James's celebrated *Medical Dictionary*—but also by calling on the evidence of Humphrey Jackson, a chemist. Jackson's evidence was twofold : that the experiments undertaken at King's Experimental Room were valueless and that James's Powder differed from Schwanberg's in that it contained mercury.

Jackson's work appears to have been carefully performed, and, in insisting on attempts to separate each powder into its constituent parts, he highlighted the inadequacies of relying on comparative experiments. He summarised his views by saying that colour, taste, smell and specific gravity, is all the "said persons [at King's Experimental Room] have discovered and which they pretend the said powders to be similar, but all this affords no proof of the identity and efficiency of the said two powders."[20] Jackson next reported on his own investigations. After careful examination of weight, colour and texture and whether the powders were acid, alkaline, or neutral, volatile or fixed, he concluded

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that James's Powder was an antimonial or mercurial preparation, or possibly a combination of both. He then set about trying to extract mercury, but finding the quantity too small he rubbed the powder on a gold ring and on polished copper. The amalgamation reactions, which he obtained convinced him that mercury was present in James's Powder.[21]

Jackson's work though entirely qualitative, was nevertheless adequate for the problem in hand.[22] It came, too, at a time when there was increasing concern with the qualitative analysis of medicaments and foodstuffs.[23] Significant developments, however, only occurred with the development of quantitative methods, and an excellent paper for illustrating this trend and continuing concern with James's Powder is George Pearson's "Experiments and observations to investigate the composition of James's Powder", read to the Royal Society on 23rd June 1791.[24]

Pearson, after emphasising that the Powder could not be obtained by following the directions given in James's patent, described first the sensory characters of the powder. He next considered the effects of heat (using a blowpipe) on the powder alone, and in combination with various substances, such as pulverised tartar and fossil alkali. The experiments indicated the presence of "a metallic calx, a part at least of which was that of antimony, mixed with earthy matter".[25]

The bulk of Pearson's experimental work, however, was a series of successive solvent extractions on a known weight of the powder. On each extract (aqueous, acetic acid, nitric acid and hydrochloric acid) and on the residue, he carried out chemical tests generally involving precipitates, which he collected and weighed. He concluded[26] that 240 grains of James's Powder contained :

Phosphorated lime, with a little antimonial calx	100.00
Algaroth Powder	57.15
Insoluble antimonial calx with a little phosphorated lime	19.85
The same insoluble calx with, probably, a little phosphorated lime	55.00
Waste	8.00
	240.00

Pearson then went on to "synthetic experiments" stating that :

> although the inability to prepare James's Powder would not prove the above conclusions, with respect to its composition, to be erroneous ; the being able to compose a substance possessing all the same properties as James's Powder, by uniting or mixing together the substances shown by the above analysis to enter into its composition, would afford all the proof and demonstration which can be had in the science of chemistry.[27]

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Pearson gave himself an excuse for possible failure in synthesising the powder if only because, hitherto, no formulation of the alleged components had yielded powder of the same colour and specific gravity as James's Powder and, like it, partially soluble in acids. However, basing his experiments on the existing *Pulvis antimonalis* of the *London Pharmacopoeia* Pearson concluded that by "calcining together bone-ashes [phosphorated lime], and antimony in a certain proportion, and afterwards exposing the mixture to a white heat, a compound was formed consisting of antimonial calx and phosphorated lime, in the same proportion, and possessing the same kind of chemical properties, as James's Powder".[28]

It is interesting that when thirty-two years later the well-regarded Richard Phillips analysed James's Powder he looked upon himself as extending Pearson's analysis, as a result of the advances in analytical chemistry that had taken place since 1791.[29] He reached substantially the same conclusions as Pearson but was more concerned with the nature of the oxide present—the protoxide (antimony trioxide) or the peroxide (antimony pentoxide) which might account for differences in activity, the trioxide being more potent. Phillips found, from the powder's solubility characteristics, that the peroxide was mainly present. He also emphasised that James's Powder *differed* from the London Pharmacopoeia's *Pulvis antimonalis* in containing half as much again of the peroxide.

The latter result highlighted a fascinating state of affairs, for the original formula for the substitute powder in the 1787 London Pharmacopoeia (1 part of sulphuret of antimony and 1 part of hartshorn) apparently gave a preparation similar to James's Powder. However, to the astonishment of many,[30] the proportions were altered to 1 : 2 in the 1809 edition, which, along with Phillips, later recognition that the proportions of trioxide and pentoxide varied from batch to batch of the finished product when made according to pharmacopoeial directions, makes much of the uncertainty and doubt over the pharmacopoeial substitute, that has been mentioned, readily understandable.

Even so, the uncertainty and doubt was made worse by at least two further points at issue. One was the question whether a mercurial preparation should be used in conjunction with James's Powder as standard treatment. In his patent, James seemed to suggest that a mercurial pill was to be used with the powder, and Powell, in the notes to his English translation of the 1809 *London Pharmacopoeia*, muddles this point further by quoting from the patent, but confusingly running the data for the powder and for the pill together.[31] Furthermore, in the early years of the powder there was the feeling that it contained mercury (witness Jackson's analysis mentioned above).[32] The result of all this seems to be that treatment sometimes included mercurials and sometimes not, which hardly made for consistent results.[33]

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The second point at issue was that in the first half of the 19th century, a grandson of James, R. G. G. James, began marketing a preparation which, he stated, was prepared according to the original formula. Following litigation, he claimed that Newbery had to change their formula and that what they marketed no longer conformed to James's original specifications.[34] What is more, other substitute powders were being marketed, such as that by John L. Kiddle, who "by the advice of his medical friends [had] been induced to prepare it for sale, and sell it at a more reasonable rate [than the genuine one]." He also guaranteed that it was the same he made and supplied to R. G. G. James for many years past.[35] Certainly one must wonder about surviving samples labelled "True James's Powder". True to what formula ?[36]

The popularity and continued use of James's Powder thus seems to have been based on a widespread belief in its efficacy as a mild antimonial preparation, and the lack of a widely accepted alternative, two points bolstered by intensive advertising, secrecy over the formula, and perhaps some failure in critical thinking. In addition, one must remember the widespread popularity of proprietary medicines for which there were many reasons.[37] One result of the popularity was that the Powder featured in innumerable domestic medicine chests, besides Queen Victoria's.

From around the middle of the 18th century, home medicine chests—containing mostly orthodox medicines of the day—were promoted widely on a commercial basis, which ultimately did much to undermine the use of remedies culled from the countryside. The fact that many over-the-counter preparations were apparently formulated by physicians, some like James being well-regarded, not only added prestige to many proprietary medicines, but also rather undermined medical criticism. Although there were many individual medical condemnations of secret remedies, these were sometimes muted. For instance, Percival in his celebrated *Medical Ethics* did not give it much room.[38] Nor did there develop any powerful pressure groups in Britain against the remedies until the two books *Secret Remedies* (London 1909) and *More Secret Remedies* (London 1912) issued by the British Medical Association at the beginning of this century.[39] It is of interest, too, that the government received a large revenue from the medicine tax on proprietary medicines, and that many of the medicine tax stamps were used for advertising by including the name of the preparation and/or the vendor.[40] The business-minded Newberys were to the fore-front in this, providing just one more facet of the many factors leading to the long-term success of James's Fever Powder, a success which must also have ultimately owed something to tradition of usage.

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Notes and References

1. British patent no. 626.
2. For recent information James's Powder and its key promoter, see *Chem & Drugg.*, 1956, 166, 254—255. Cf., *ibid.*, 1874, 15, 112—116. A substitute powder (see below) remained "official" until the 1948 *British Pharmaceutical Codex.*
3. Dr. George Rousseau has prepared a manuscript "Dr. Robert James and his Fever Powders", which discusses fully the controversy. The paper also gives the few biographical details of James that are available, and information on the impact of the powder in the literary world. Rousseau favours the view that James owed nothing to Schwanberg, but does not discuss the chemistry. See fn. 19 for key references.
4. Hawes, W., *An Account of the late Dr. Goldsmith's illness, so far as it relates to the exhibition of Dr. James's Powders*, London, 1774.
5. *A Dissertation on Dr. James's Powder. In which the different circumstances wherein that Remedy may prove beneficial or hurtful, are considered and distinguished, according to observation and reason*, London, 1760, p. 39.
6. *Observations on Antimony*, London, 1774, p. 71
7. Another significant source of criticism was in John Quincy's widely used *Pharmacopoeia Officinalis & Extemporanea : or, A Compleat English Dispensatory*, various editions from 1718.
8. Newbery was also an influential literary figure, cf. C. Welsh's *A Bookseller of the Last Century*, London, 1885, which also gives much information on Newbery's involvement with James. James's advertising consisted of broadsheets of which many survive, and his *A Dissertation on Fevers and Inflammatory Distempers*, which went through many editions. In the sixth edition (1764) he claimed that 1,612,800 doses had been sold (in addition to large amounts given to the poor). This is almost certainly an overestimate, but James refers to *doses*, not packets. Of the latter Newbery certainly sold large numbers. For instance, in 1769, he purchased 136 gross of packets from James (information from Oxford History of Science Museum Ms. 46). Information on the sales for the first two decades of the powder has not been found.
9. There had been much written on advertising : for a useful introduction, cf. Young, J. H., *The Toadstool Millionaires*, Princeton, 1961.
10. Newbery collaborated with Goldsmith in writing *Little Goody Two Shoes*. In the story the heroine's father "died miserably" because he was "seized with a violent fever in a place where Dr. James's Powder was not to be had". For some information on the literary impact of the Powder see Hill, B., "An 18th Century Cure All", *Hist. Med.* 1969, 24-26. Rousseau, *op. cit.* (fn. 3), will be providing a full account.
11. See Macalpine, I. and Hunter, R., *George III and the Mad-Business*, London, 1969.
12. Cf. Wellcome Institute Ms. 311993.
13. *Pharm. J. & Trans.*, 1841-42, 1, 309.
14. One of the most notable "secret" remedies was Joshua Ward's pill & drop, cf. M. H. Nicolson, "Ward's ' Pill and Drop ' and Men of Letters", *J. Hist. Ideas*, 1968, 29 177—196. In contrast was the popular Huxham's Tincture or antimony wine, (see Huxham, J., *An Essay on Fevers. To which is now added a Dissertation on the Malignant, Ulcerous Sore-Throat*, London, 1782). His recommendation for antimony wine is on pp. 229—230. For a general account of the problem of fevers in the 18th century, which stimulated interest in antimonial remedies, see King, L. S., *The Medical World of the 18th Century*, Chicago, 1958.
15. See Beddoes, T., *The Elements of Medicine, or, a translation of the Elements Medicinal Brunonis, with large notes, illustrations, and comments, by the author of the original work with*

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observations on the character and writings of the author, Philadelphia, 1806. For a useful account of heroic medicine in the 19th century, relevant to the theme, cf. Berman, A. "The heroic approach in 19th century therapeutics", *Bull. Am. Soc. Hosp. Pharm*, 1954, *Sept.-Oct.*, 321—327.

16. This ultimately led to the advocacy of tartar emetic (antimony potassium tartrate). Cf., for instance, Phillips, R., *A Translation of the Pharmacopoeia of the Royal College of Physicians of London*, London, 1836, p. 216.
17. The most widely used booklet mentioning the antimonial powder was *Cox's Companion to the Medicine Chest*, which went to more than 55 editions throughout the 19th century.
18. P. 357
19. Information on the controversy between Baker and James is derived from manuscripts (no. 4650) in the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine. Much of the information is also in *the Affadavits and Proceedings of Walter Baker . . . upon his petition . . . to vacate the patent obtained by Dr. Robert James for Schwanberg's Powder* . . . London, 1754 and *An Answer to a late Scurrilous Pamphlet . . . respecting Dr. James's Powder*, London, n.d. The original documents have been quoted in this account.
20. Wellcome Institute ms. 4650/92240/VII, f.4.
21. *Ibid.*, f.6
22. It was in marked contrast to the deposition of another chemist involved in the Baker—James controversy, John Lloyd. Lloyd pointed out that there were a number of different antimonial preparations available varying in their ingredients both qualitatively and quantitatively—but he believed "no experiment can ascertain the difference" (Ms. 4650, John Lloyd's deposition).
23. There is much evidence for this. Cf. Dossie, R., *The Elaboratory Laid Open*, London, 1758, and such ephemeral publications as Anon., *Serious Reflections on the Manifold Dangers attending the use of Copper Vessels*, London, 1755.
24. *Phil. Trans.*, 1791, **81**, 317—367. Pearson also issued this paper as a pamphlet with different pagination, which has been used for this study.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 4
26. *Ibid.*, p. 27
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 29—30
28. *Ibid.*, p. 51
29. "Analysis of James's Powder", *Ann. Phil.*, 1823, **6**, 187—191.
30. For instance, Thomson, A. T., *The London Dispensatory*, London, 1811, pp. 501—502. Pearson, G., "On the Pulvis Antimonalis of the London Pharmacopoeia", *Lond. Med. Phys. J.*, 1816, **35**, 345—346. One of the results of the change was that the London formula differed from that in the Edinburgh and Dublin Pharmacopoeias.
31. Powell, R., *The Pharmacopoeia of the Royal College of Physicians of London, M.DCCC.IX translated into English, with Notes Etc.*, London, 1815 (3rd edition), p. 115.
32. Cf. also Flemyng, *op. cit.* (fn.5).
33. An interesting paper indicating the use of mercury is W. Tyson's "On some preparations of antimony and of mercury", *Pharm. J. and Trans.*, 1841-42, **1**, 449—453.
34. R. G. G. James repeatedly stated this in his advertisements, cf., *Medical Directory*, 1860.
35. Advertising sheet in possession of the Wellcome Institute.
36. Samples labelled "True James's Powder" are in the Wellcome Institute.
37. It is outside the scope of this note to discuss the reasons, but they include shortcomings in orthodox medicine and difficulties in obtaining rapid advice in rural areas.
38. Leakie, C. D., *Percival's Medical Ethics*, Baltimore, 1927, pp. 104—105.
39. The Powder did not feature in either of the volumes.
40. For information on the medicine tax stamps see Griffenhagen, G., *Medicine Tax Stamps Worldwide*, Milwaukee, 1971, pp. 3-26.

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